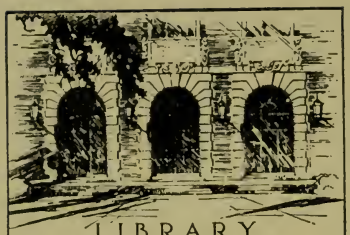

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THE TREMLETT DIAMONDS

BY

ALAN ST. AUBYN

AUTHOR OF

'A FELLOW OF TRINITY,' 'THE JUNIOR DEAN,' 'THE OLD MAID'S SWEETHEART,' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIV.	DORA'S DISAPPOINTMENT	1
XV.	EDITH DARCY'S WEDDING-DAY	12
XVI.	HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT	30
XVII.	AT THE POLICE-COURT	44
XVIII.	DORA RUNS AWAY	57
XIX.	TO SAVE A SCANDAL	79
XX.	CASTLE HILL	99
XXI.	TREMLETT *v.* STANHOPE	116
XXII.	ON BAIL	132
XXIII.	'MY HUSBAND!'	148
XXIV.	'MY GRANDFATHER'S MINIATURE'	156
XXV.	FREE!	174
XXVI.	'KNOCK IT DOWN!'	188
XXVII.	A SACRED CONVICTION	202

THE TREMLETT DIAMONDS

CHAPTER XIV.

DORA'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

Fryston was not nearly ready for occupation when Dora Tremlett's honeymoon was over. The alterations that Captain Tremlett had suggested during that visit to Nunwell had taken a considerable time to carry out. They were not all carried out yet; it did not seem at all likely that the rooms would be fit for occupation before Christmas.

Dora was counting the days to get back. No honeymoon had ever dragged so heavily; the slow weeks refused to pass. It seemed to

her, at the end of that miserable month, that she was no nearer returning home than the day she had come away.

When Mrs. Bellew had settled that Edith should be married from her house, she had written to her son-in-law and begged him to bring Dora up to town for the wedding. He could not refuse to do this with very good grace, but he had consented unwillingly. He was not fond of his wife's bosom friend—he was not fond of any of his wife's friends—and he had, under the circumstances, a not unnatural disinclination to bring her into too close relationship with them. So long as he could keep Dora away from her family and her friends, he could treat her very much as he liked; but if she once returned to her own people, there might be unpleasant disclosures, and no one could say what would happen.

Captain Tremlett so far kept his promise to his mother-in-law that he brought his wife back from Scotland. He did not bring her direct to

town. He stayed at Leicester on the way back for a few days' hunting; and then he found it desirable to make a détour and travel by way of Cheltenham, and finally he left Dora with her maid in Cheltenham, and went up to town alone.

It may be said that Dora should not have submitted to such treatment, that she ought to have shown some spirit.

It would not have been easy for her to refuse obedience to her husband's commands; it would have taken a woman with more courage than she possessed to assert her rights, and refuse to be dictated to. There was a little scene the night before he went up to town, when she understood that she was not to be present at Edith's wedding. She shed a few tears; she could not keep her tears back when he told her that he was going up alone.

'I can't see what you've got to blubber at,' he said in his agreeable way; 'you've got all you

want here. Most women would be satisfied to stay here if their husbands wished it.'

'I should be glad to stay here, Lionel, when —when we come back from town; but I should like to go up for Edith's wedding. You don't know what she is to me; we have been more than sisters. She was my bridesmaid, you remember.'

'Yes, and helped you to make away with that necklace. You hadn't the wit to contrive it yourself; you wanted someone to put you up to it. I shouldn't be surprised if she hasn't got it—she, or that fellow Vernon.'

He still believed, or pretended to believe, in the existence of a mythical lover of his wife's, who was supposed to be in possession of the lost diamonds. It was one of his delusions, a creation of his disordered brain, and Dora had ceased to take any notice of it. She could not always tell what he was raving about; the name Vernon was unknown to her, but that did not matter. She only knew that he intended

to wound her, and one name was as good as another. He was always raving about Vernon, when the subject of the missing diamonds happened to be uppermost in his mind, but he had never coupled Edith's name with them before.

Dora raised her head in surprise—surprise and indignation; she could bear anything herself—she had got accustomed to bearing things—but she could not listen in silence to this charge against her dearest friend.

'I don't think you should say such things about Edith Darcy, Lionel. She is going to marry a man who would not bear things being said about his wife,' she said with some spirit.

'You—you mean that he would horsewhip me?' Captain Tremlett said mockingly, his dark face flushing with passion.

'I mean that you should be careful what you say; that Derek Stanhope loves the girl he is going to marry: he worships the ground she

walks on ; he is not the man to let anyone cast a slur on his wife's honour.'

She could not keep a thrill of tenderness, of pain, out of her voice ; she was contrasting Edith's lot with hers.

'Oh, oh, oh! we'll see about that.' He laughed scornfully as he spoke, and glared down at Dora sitting in her low chair beside the fire with a sudden fury and exultation in his bloodshot eyes that made her shiver.

She sat there trembling long after he had gone, wondering what new cruelty he had in his mind, what fresh misery he was planning for her. She was sorry that she had mentioned Edith's name.

When Captain Tremlett arrived in town, he did not go to his mother-in-law's ; he drove straight to Mr. Finch's office. He had sent a telegram before he started from Cheltenham, arranging an interview with the detective, and he drove straight from the station to his office.

Mr. Finch had some news for him about the diamonds. They had been traced, or, at least, some of them had been traced. He had a clue.

'That fellow Vernon is in it, I'll be bound,' his client said, with some of the flowers of speech with which he was wont to adorn his conversation.

The detective looked blank; he had never heard of Mr. Vernon. As that individual only existed in the Captain's too fervid imagination, this was not to be wondered at.

'The name is not Vernon,' he said, looking immensely wise; 'unless that is the name of the party she is going to marry.'

'You don't mean it's a woman?' the Captain said, with some expression of astonishment.

Mr. Finch nodded his head.

The case was not complete, and he declined to commit himself to a statement. It was very nearly complete; there were a few links wanting in the chain of evidence. When complete, it would, the detective averred, be as pretty a

bit of circumstantial evidence as he had come across for some time. He prided himself on the ingenuity with which he had pieced it together. There was not a man in London, he said, who could have followed out the clue as he had followed it out. The police had declared themselves baffled; they had suspected several people, but they had not got hold of a clue. The detective that Sir Bourchier had employed had also failed. He, too, had suspected certain people, and he had got hold of a clue, but nothing had resulted from his inquiries. Not a single trace of the necklace had been discovered. It was from a name that this man had let drop that Dora's husband got that absurd delusion about a former lover.

He was a young detective, and he was almost too clever. He never suspected people that the experienced members of the force suspected; he was working on a different line, and held certain theories about the missing diamonds

that no detective in his senses would have held for a moment. Whatever his theories were worth, he had not found the necklace.

His inquiries had taken up a long time ; they had diverted him entirely from the right scent, and they had ended in disappointment. He had really found out nothing, for all his cleverness. He had tracked the man Venner—his name was Venner, not Vernon—and kept a watch on his movements for a month past. There was some secret understanding, he had discovered, between this man and Mrs. Bellew's new maid. There had been stolen meetings in the grounds at Nunwell of nights, of which the detective had been an unseen witness.

He had not learnt much from these meetings, except that the woman always came unwillingly, and that she generally went away crying. The man intimidated her ; she would not have stolen out to meet him if she had not been afraid to disobey him. She did not come of her own free will, and she went back through the

shrubbery crying, until she came in sight of the house.

Most likely he was an old lover, and he was trading on some incident of past weakness or folly to intimidate her and use her as a means of extortion.

The detective found out all about the fellow. He was a journeyman painter, and he had been six months in the employ of the distinguished firm he was then working for. His antecedents had been rather shady ; he did not appear to have kept any situation for a great length of time, and there were long intervals between his engagements. He was out of work more often than he was in work. Still, in the expressive language of the profession, 'there was nothing against him.' He had not been previously convicted.

It was almost past reason to believe that, if he had got possession of the missing diamonds, he would have been willing to continue working at Fryston as a journeyman painter—that

he would not have found some excuse for throwing up his work and living at ease on the proceeds of his spoil. He was not exactly the man to work when he had the means to play.

Putting these things together, the detective had begun to think he was on the wrong scent; that he had wasted a great deal of valuable time upon Patience and her lover.

CHAPTER XV.

EDITH DARCY'S WEDDING-DAY.

EDITH did not go back to Lowndes Square till the day before the wedding. The illness of her aunt was a sufficient reason for the delay. Miss Gunning was really ill; she was 'breaking up,' as the doctors expressed it. She had had an iron constitution in her time, but it could not last for ever. It had lasted for over fourscore years, and now it was 'breaking up.'

The decay, or the falling to pieces, rather—the decay had been going on for years—began at the top. Her brain, the doctors agreed, was quite gone; she would never be free from delusions again.

Her last delusion was that she was going to be married; she was busy all day with preparations for the wedding.

She would insist on being dressed at seven o'clock on these raw, misty October mornings, in order to be ready in time for the ceremony; and she would array herself for the occasion in the most fantastic garments.

The doctors had given orders that she was to be humoured in her whims, that she was not to be excited by opposition, so long as they did not take any mischievous form. Penfold dutifully waited upon her mistress, and turned out her drawers in obedience to her wishes, and covered the bed and the furniture of her room with the old-fashioned, faded finery of her youth. Her jewelry had long ago been removed to a place of safety by the trustees, and there were only a few ornaments of little value left behind. Whatever trinkets Penfold could find, the poor old soul put on, by way of adornment for her wedding: chains about her

neck, and brooches pinned on indiscriminately, and gold eyeglasses suspended over her ears by way of earrings; and, to crown all, a wreath of artificial roses—roses whose blooms had faded half a century ago—on her wide-frilled night-cap. Sometimes she would have a lace veil thrown over her, and, thus adorned, she would sit patiently through the long weary day waiting for the coming of the bridegroom.

She was sitting up in bed, arrayed in this sad, fantastic fashion, when Edith went in to wish her good-bye, the day she returned to Lowndes Square. It was not likely that she would ever see her again; she would have to carry away with her for the rest of her life the remembrance of this last sad sight. The pitifulness of it broke her down; she was not given to breaking down, but she could not look on this poor masquerade without tears.

To come to this at the end of a long life! To live a selfish, narrow existence, unloving

and unloved, for fourscore years, and come to this at the end!

'I have come to say good-bye, Aunt Maria,' she said, standing beside her bed, with her wet eyes, and a little break in her voice. 'Good-bye, and God bless you for all your kindness to me! I may never have a chance of thanking you again, and I want you to know—I am sure you will be able to understand by-and-by, if you don't understand what I say now—that I am not ungrateful for all your kindness to me. I would have loved you more if you would have let me. I don't know who has been in fault; perhaps we both have. We thought we could get on without love, and we made a mistake, and we have found it out too late. I hope God will make up to you by-and-by for what you have missed here.'

Her tears were falling on the old wrinkled hand that lay on the coverlet. She was genuinely sorry as she stood there that she had not tried to do more for the old woman

while she had been with her—that she had given her back so little.

It is not of much use being sorry; sorrow, regret, remorse, always come too late. Something in her voice or manner, or the tears falling on her hand, may have stirred some dim memories in the old woman's clouded mind.

'I kept them for you, my dear. I always intended them for you; there is no other Edith Gunning.'

'What did you intend for me, Aunt Maria?' Edith asked.

'What—what—what?' The memory seemed to have failed again; presently she looked up with a light in her dim eyes. 'It is in the bureau,' she said.

'What is in the bureau?' Edith asked eagerly.

She was thinking of the diamonds. Of course it would be nothing; it would not be a legal gift if her aunt, in her present state, were to give them to her; still, it would be a satis-

faction to know that she wished her to have them, to feel that, whatever arose, they were hers—her own.

The old woman on the bed put aside the veil with a gesture of impatience.

'Don't you know?' she said querulously. 'Don't you know that it has been there waiting for years——'

'What has been there for years, Aunt Maria? What is it you wish me to have?'

It was her last chance; she may be forgiven for being eager.

'The wedding-cake!' Miss Gunning said, in a confidential whisper. 'It has been there for fifty years; but it is for you—it is all for you!'

Edith sighed.

She had to go away; it was no use standing there listening to the unreasoning words let fall by a madwoman. If she had stayed there a minute longer she would have lost her train.

She went away, and left the old woman

sitting up in bed, in her wreath and veil, with the two white cats solemnly watching her, waiting for the bridegroom.

She did not reach Lowndes Square until late in the day, in the gray, cheerless October dusk. It was the end of October—it was just November—and the November fogs had already begun. It was a raw, cheerless afternoon, with the gray November fog coming down from the leaden sky, and closing around her when the cab that had brought her from the station stopped at Lowndes Square. The dark porch of the house and the iron railings seemed to loom out of the fog to greet her, as she stepped out of the cab. There was nothing else to greet her; no one had met her at the station, no one was at home to receive her. Mrs. Bellew had gone off to Paddington to meet Dora; her husband had relented at the last, and had promised that she should come, and her mother had gone off with a beating heart to meet her.

She did not come back until Edith had been

in the house an hour, and then she came back alone. Dora had not come, after all. There was a telegram awaiting her when she got back that explained her absence, but it did not explain it very satisfactorily.

'Something unforeseen has happened,' the telegram ran, 'and my presence at Edith's wedding would add to the difficulty. You will understand to-morrow that it was better for me to keep away.'

'What does she mean?' Mrs. Bellew said tearfully. 'How can anything have happened to make it better for her to stay away?'

She could not keep her tears back; she was so broken down with this disappointment that she sat down and cried, and Edith said what she could to comfort her.

'I'm afraid it is on my account,' she said. 'I am sure Captain Tremlett does not like me. He is a little jealous of Dora having an affection for anyone else; he wants to have her all to himself.'

'My dear, he can have no love for the poor child at all. If he had any love for her, he would not treat her as he does. I cannot think what made him marry her!'

And then the poor mother, sitting there weeping in the firelight, poured out into Edith's sympathetic ears the story of Dora's woes—the story so far as she had heard it.

'I think he is a brute!' Edith said indignantly, when she had finished. 'The poor, innocent darling has no brother of her own to take her part, or he would not dare to treat her so. He is a horrid, mean, cowardly brute! Oh, how I wish Derek could give him a good horsewhipping!'

Edith could think of nothing all the evening but Dora's unhappiness, when she ought to have been thinking of the morrow. She was dull and depressed all the evening, when she ought to have been at her brightest and best. Her lover could not tell what had come to her.

'What is it that is worrying you, darling?'

he asked her once, when he saw two distinct little upright lines on her smooth forehead. 'I am sure you have got something on your mind.'

She tried to laugh away his fears, but the tears came into her eyes; she could not keep them back.

'It is nothing,' she said—'it is nothing. I was not thinking about myself.'

This was not quite accurate; she was really thinking a good deal about herself all through that long, long night before her wedding. She thought the night would never go, and yet she dreaded the morning. She lay awake all through the night counting the hours, and in the gray dreary dawn, when she ought to have been waking up, she fell asleep.

A dreadful doubt haunted her all through those wakeful hours. She had not been so frank with the man she was about to marry as she should have been; she had kept something back. She had misled him as to certain

things—things that he might some day find out—and she could not justify herself for the deception. Before the morning dawned she had made up her mind—quite made up her mind—that before the wedding took place she would tell him the whole truth; she would keep nothing back. There should be no cause for reproach in the future.

That hour or two of refreshing sleep had done something for her; but when she got up and looked in the glass, she told herself she was not looking at all like a bride. Her eyelids were heavy, and there were dark rims beneath her eyes, and there was not a vestige of colour in her cheeks. She was feeling weak, and tired, and miserable. All her good intentions had oozed away; they had died quite out when the morning came.

Her weakness and helplessness overpowered her, and, instead of cheerfully setting about the delightful task of putting on her wedding clothes, she sat down on the side of the

bed and sobbed in a kind of recklessness of despair.

'Why should I tell him?' she asked herself. 'He need never, never know. And it was for his sake: I could not bear that he should be reproached. It is more than I can do to tell him!'

Mrs. Bellew's maid came into the room and found Edith sobbing on the edge of the bed, when she ought to have been up and dressed. She could not hide her agitation from the girl, but she dried her eyes, and set about making her preparations, but without any hopefulness or cheerfulness. There was a dull weight at her heart that she could not get rid of—could not account for.

Everybody declared, when she came downstairs to breakfast, that she was looking frightful; she was not looking at all as a bride ought to look. The bridegroom's sisters, who came early to help her to dress, whispered together about her altered looks; they could

not think what poor Derek could see in her. Most of the people who came to the wedding were of the same opinion. Her cousins, Richard Darcy's daughters, thought she was very lucky to get a man to marry her: if she had let this chance slip—it was not much of a chance, they owned—she would never have got another.

White had never suited Edith—it was too much like her face; only to-day her face was gray, not white, and she had not a particle of colour to relieve it. No one could understand why, with such a complexion, she had chosen a white wedding gown. There is some fiction about maiden purity in the selection of white for a bridal colour. Perhaps this may have guided Edith's choice; but it was an unhappy choice. She thought of the poor figure she had left sitting up in the great four-post bedstead at Gotham, as she stood before the glass in her bridal wreath and veil.

The thought almost broke her down again;

for a moment she wavered in her resolution. If the bridegroom had been there, instead of waiting for her at the church, she would have told him then; she would not have gone on with the wedding without telling him. Now that it was too late, she was anxious to tell him; she was more than anxious—she was wild to tell him! He would not come to the house again till after the wedding, when it would be too late; she had let the opportunity slip, and there would not be another. She could hardly take him aside in the church, before all those people, and tell him. No; it was clearly too late. Whatever confession she had to make would have to be made after the wedding.

The people were all gathered in the drawing-room below — her uncle Richard, who was to give her away; and his wife, whom she hated; and the girl cousins, who were to act as bridesmaids. She had got together as good a muster of relatives as she could, that Derek's people should not think her friendless. His mother

and father were awaiting them at the church ; but his sisters were to follow in Edith's train. They were good-natured girls, and they were sorry for their brother—sorry he was not going to do any better, that he had got such a bad bargain. If they had chosen for him, it would have been different ; but he had not consulted them in his choice.

The bride came downstairs at last, a white, washed-out-looking bride, with dark circles round her eyes. People could not think what she was making such a fuss about ; the very best thing that could happen to her was to get married. She hadn't a single tie in the world, nothing to hold her back, and she was marrying a man who adored her. Most girls in her place would have been hardly able to contain their happiness ; they would have jumped for joy, if it had been decorous for brides to jump.

Edith was very far from jumping as she came slowly down the stairs in her white, with the

two youngest bridesmaids behind her carrying her train. It seemed quite ridiculous to spend so much money on a wedding gown, on all those yards and yards of white satin, merely to drag it behind her on the ground, when she wanted the money so much for other things—for needful things. Edith had her own reasons for this useless expenditure. She wanted her husband to be proud of her. She would not have had him ashamed of her for the world.

All this show—the breakfast in Lowndes Square; the carriages—the Square was full of carriages; the wedding guests; the white favours on the breasts of the servants; the bows on the horses' ears—was for him. She would have done without all this herself. She would have loved to do without it, to have walked quietly into an obscure church, and stood alone beside him before the altar, and made her vows.

Perhaps she was thinking of this as she came down the stairs, with her white satin gown

rustling behind her. The hall was full of guests waiting to see her pass out, and there was a crowd collected on the pavement before the door. A scarlet cloth had been thrown down over the steps to the carriage, and the crowd were pressing round on either side. It seemed nothing but a sea of faces before her as she went down the stairs—a sea of eager, watchful faces, piled and heaped up in the hall, on the steps, outside in the street, as faces are crowded together at a theatre. They all seemed to swim before her eyes as she came slowly down the stairs—she could not see distinctly for the mist before her eyes—she only saw the crowd; and she was dimly conscious that there was some confusion in the hall below, that the men were pressing round, and the women were drawing back;—and there was a suppressed sound, like a cry, in the air.

She never knew how it all happened. The faces that had been looking up to her so smiling and eager were turned suddenly into stone.

It all happened in a moment; the confusion, the little knot of men gathered in the hall, the earnest consultation, the awestruck whisper that stole around, the wedding guests falling back affrighted, and a man disengaging himself from the rest, and coming forward to meet her at the foot of the stairs.

He had his hand upon her arm before she knew it, upon the gloved hand and arm that carried the wedding bouquet, and his voice was in her ears — a strange voice, and strange words:

'I arrest you on the charge of having stolen a diamond necklace.'

CHAPTER XVI.

HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT.

It had been cruelly arranged. It had been arranged with diabolical malice and cruelty, to arrest a bride on such a charge, at such a moment.

When anything at all could be done, when anybody was able to think of anything, messages were sent to the church—not explicit messages, but messages to the effect that there would be no wedding.

The uncle of the bride, Mr. Richard Darcy, was the first person who recovered his wits, who was able to grasp the situation ; he hurried the frightened bridesmaids back to their respective

homes, and dismissed the guests. He had to stay behind himself—it was his brother's child, he could not very well go away—but he stayed with a bad grace.

'I am sure you ought to come with us, Richard,' his wife said indignantly, as he was putting her into the carriage. 'You ought not to get mixed up with this disgraceful affair; you should consider your own children. Of course she is guilty! Where else could she have got all the money from? I always doubted her.'

A great many people thought Edith guilty besides her aunt. Everybody had heard the story of the missing necklace, and now the mystery was explained. Edith had had it in her possession all the time.

The father and mother of the bridegroom had driven back from the church to Lowndes Square for an explanation, and when they were informed what had happened, they had gone back to their hotel. They had gone back with the firm conviction that Edith was guilty.

Only the bridegroom had remained behind; everybody else had gone away. Richard Darcy had counselled him to go away, too. He had explained to him that now, of course, everything was at an end; it would be better for him to go away. It was lucky that it had happened when it did, before the wedding; but now there was no reason why his name should be mixed up in this most deplorable affair. The wisest thing for him to do was to go away.

Still the bridegroom remained behind.

'I will never believe her guilty,' he said, 'until I hear it from her own lips.'

Edith could not have seen her lover alone if she had wished. A man was waiting on the landing, outside her bedroom door, while she changed her dress. She had to take off her wedding things and put on another gown; she could not go to prison dressed in all her wedding finery. The man was unwilling to lose sight of her, but he consented to wait outside the door. If Derek Stanhope spoke to her, he

would have to speak to her in the presence of others.

He saw her as she came down the stairs, with Mrs. Bellew's arms around her. Mrs. Bellew was weeping; she would not believe her guilty; she thought it was some cruel devilry devised by her amiable son-in-law.

Edith was walking down the stairs like one in a dream. She was so stunned and bewildered that she could not understand what had happened. The blow had been so sudden and unexpected that it had stunned her into unconsciousness. She was only able to realize the terrible abasement the shock would be to her lover; she did not seem to think of herself.

She saw his white face at the foot of the stairs, as he came forward to lead her into the room — into the wretched room where her wedding feast was spread.

The policeman came in with her, and someone closed the door behind them. The meeting was too sacred for curious eyes.

'Darling!' he said. He could not say another word; he could only take her to his bosom. 'Darling!'

Her dry-eyed terror and grief gave way at the sound of his dear voice, and she was sobbing violently on his breast.

'Oh, why was I ever born, to bring this shame upon you!' she sobbed.

He could not answer her wild appeal; he could only strain her to his breast. But her words cut him like a knife.

'Must I go with them, Derek—must I go? Can't you save me?' she cried, in the bewilderment of her terror, clinging to him desperately with her trembling hands.

'Darling,' he said hoarsely, with his face very pale and his lips quivering—'darling, I would give my life to save you!'

'Must I go, Derek? Is—is there no help?' she asked wildly.

He shook his head; he could not trust himself to look at her—to read the agony in her dear face.

'There is no help,' he said, with a groan. 'Oh, my God! that I should have to stand by, and not be able to help you!'

She uttered a cry of pain like some wounded thing. She could not understand that he could do nothing; she was too stunned to reason. She shrank out of his embrace. What was his love worth if it could not help her? She had no one else to appeal to, and he would not help her.

'Go!' she repeated, with a shudder—'go, go! Oh yes, I am ready to go! It cannot matter now what becomes of me!'

'Edith,' he said, 'for pity's sake, do not leave me like this! Remember, whatever happens, I love you!'

She did not seem to hear what he said; she followed the men out of the room, and out of the house, and got into the carriage that was waiting at the door—the carriage that had brought the bridegroom back from the church. The coachman still had a white favour in his

buttonhole as he drove away. She might have been going off for her honeymoon, only that Mrs. Bellew was inside with her instead of the bridegroom, and there was a policeman on the box.

Mrs. Bellew would not let Edith go alone; she went with her, and Derek Stanhope followed behind in a cab. He did not know how he got out of the house. He was like one demented; his mind was in a whirl; he could not think with this cloud of agony and shame obscuring everything; he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of immeasurable pity.

When the cab reached the station, there was nothing to be done. Edith would be charged with stealing the necklace the following day before a magistrate, and until then nothing could be done. He had to see the prison doors close upon her, and go away and leave her to her fate.

He would willingly have changed places with

her, if that would have been any good, but nothing that he could do or say could help her. His love was no good to her, he told himself; he could not save her from a single pang. His love meant very little to her, after all. It was clearly no use standing outside that closed door, beating his head against the wall; it would not avail her if he beat it to a jelly. He got into the cab again, and drove to the Temple and saw his lawyer, and brought him back with him to the place where Edith was confined.

She refused to see the lawyer whom he brought; she was too overwhelmed with what had happened to be in a fit state to see anyone, and she was unable to write. Her temples were throbbing with the mental agitation she had gone through, and her brain was stunned and bewildered; she did not seem to want anything but to lie down and die.

After his fruitless attempts to help Edith he went back to the hotel where his people were staying.

They were already packing up to go back when he reached there. There was nothing for them to stay for; there could be no wedding now, and the sooner they got back to their own place the better.

Mrs. Stanhope was in tears, and the girls were hot and indignant.

'Oh, my poor boy, what an escape for you!' his mother said, as she pressed the reluctant bridegroom in her arms. 'Think what would have happened if you had married her!'

'I should have been better able to defend her, mother; that's all that would have happened,' he said with some heat.

'Defend her! You don't mean to say that you will ever have anything more to do with that—that abandoned creature!'

Mrs. Stanhope couldn't find any other word to express Edith's guilt. The colour quite forsook her face at her son's words.

'You forget, mother, that you are speaking of my affianced wife,' her son said sternly.

'Wife!' gasped the poor woman, sinking into a chair. 'You don't mean that you would marry her after this?'

'I shall most certainly marry her,' he said gravely.

'Derek, you must be mad!' screamed his sisters in a breath.

They had taken off their pretty bridesmaids' dresses, and they had put on their travelling gowns, and they were cross and indignant and disappointed. They had been making preparations for weeks past for the wedding—they had talked of nothing else—and now there was to be no wedding.

'I think you had better go back with us, my boy,' his father said kindly. 'It won't do for you to stay here and get mixed up with this unhappy affair. You must think of your mother and the girls.'

'You wouldn't have me run away from her in her trouble, sir?' the young man said hotly.

'I don't see what else you can do, my boy. It's a terrible scandal; the police must have got a pretty clear case, or they wouldn't have gone to this length. It would never do for you to be mixed up with it. You could hardly stay in the regiment if—if you took her part. It would be laying yourself open to—well, if not suspicion, to question. Your name would be in everybody's mouth.'

Derek Stanhope flushed scarlet; he had certainly not thought of it in that light; he had not had time, indeed, to think of anything.

'I should send in my resignation, sir,' he said huskily.

'Dear Derek, do listen to reason,' his mother pleaded tearfully; 'think of your family before you do anything rash. The woman who could do this base, this shameful act can be nothing to you in the future; she is not worth a thought. If she is guilty, Derek, you must give her up; you must not bring shame and disgrace upon your family.'

'But she is not guilty, mother!'

'That has to be proved. They would not have arrested her at such a time if the evidence had not been clear against her. For the sake of your family, Derek, promise me you will do nothing rash.'

'I can make no promises, mother. If it had happened half an hour later, Edith would have been my wife, and I should have been bound to protect her, to make her cause mine. You would not have me desert her in her extremity because the ceremony hadn't actually taken place?'

'No, thank God it hadn't taken place!' said his mother fervently.

'I am just as much bound as if it had taken place,' Derek said, with a quiet determination in his voice that went to her heart. 'I am her natural protector. She has no one else; she is alone in the world. Good God! mother, what do you think of me, that I should desert her in her trouble?'

It was no use reasoning with him ; he would not be persuaded. He could not see that he owed it to his family to desert the woman he loved in her sore distress. He went away, if not exactly in a rage, hot and indignant, and vowing that nothing should hinder him, no considerations of love or duty should keep him from doing what he conceived he was bound in honour to do—to stand by his betrothed wife through thick and thin. There was a manliness in his decision ; if he had been anyone else, they would have said he was right.

He left his mother in tears ; and the girls, if not exactly tearing their hair and stamping their feet, were certainly not behaving well.

'I think she is a mean, horrid creature!' Lucy, his eldest sister, screamed after him as he beat an inglorious retreat. 'I hope she'll be sent to the treadmill, and that they'll cut off all her hideous black hair' (Lucy had yellow hair), 'and keep her on bread and water——'

He did not stay to hear any more. He

heard quite enough to know what reception his future bride might expect from the members of his family.

It was remarkable, the unanimity with which the female members of both families decided that Edith was guilty. They had not waited for the verdict of judge and jury; they had settled it for themselves. They had jumped, as the female mind is wont to jump, at the conclusion that Edith had stolen the necklace. Her own relatives—her aunt and cousins—were not a whit more lenient in their judgment than the relatives of her lover. They were sure she was guilty from the first. Where else could she have got the money for the wedding, and for furnishing that flat they had heard so much about, if she had not stolen the diamonds?

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE POLICE-COURT.

EDITH was formally charged at the police-court before a magistrate the next morning.

Her lover and the lawyer who had come to her on the previous day were waiting for her in the court when she was brought in, and Mrs. Bellew drove up presently. She had come prepared to offer bail to any amount, if the magistrate would release her.

It was only a police-court inquiry—a mere formal charge—and there was only one magistrate on the bench. The case had come on early, and there were not many people present.

Edith was led into the court by a policeman;

she had to be led in—she did not seem able to walk. Her hands were clenched tightly before her, and her eyes were cast down, and the pallor of her face was frightful. She might have been going through some terrible ordeal.

The magistrate on the bench compassionated her weakness and her evident distress, and requested that a chair might be given her. It was not until the charge had been formally made that she looked round and saw her lover. He was standing as near to her as he was allowed to stand ; and Mrs. Bellew was almost by her side. She did not see her ; she did not see anyone but Derek. Her narrow world only held one person ; she had no eyes for any other.

In that first rapid glance she saw the change that the last twenty-four hours had made in him. His face was as white as her own, and his lips were trembling. He could not keep his lips steady, and there was a great compassion and tenderness in his eyes when they

met hers. She could not mistake the look in his eyes. She nearly broke down when she saw him standing there, ready to come to her aid—ready to lay down his life for her, if need be. Her self-possession almost deserted her; her hands were nervously working, and she was unconsciously fingering her engagement-ring. She had come away without gloves, and her hands were bare.

Her eyes met his for one moment. Someone was asking her a question. She did not heed the question; she was looking over to her lover.

There was a sad, yearning pity in the dear eyes that went to her heart. He was calmer than she was—calmer and firmer, in spite of the ghastly paleness of his face. He was looking at her across the squalid and miserable surroundings of the police-court with a look she could not mistake, that spoke to her heart as plain as words:

'I have faith in you; though all the world doubt you, I have faith in you.'

She did not know how she would have got through that horrible ordeal if it had not been for his presence, and that message in his eyes.

She could not understand at all what was going on. Some men were talking together at a table in the body of the court, and someone was asking questions. The questions did not seem to have anything to do with the case. Her head was so confused that she could not understand what they were saying. It would not have helped her if she had. It seemed to her that they kept her sitting there for hours, while the talking and whispering went on. She heard her own name spoken now and then by strange voices, and she hardly recognised it for hers. It was all strange and unreal. The voices seemed to be speaking at a distance; what they said did not seem to have anything to do with her, and the name—the name they were bandying about—belonged to another.

When the ceremony was over, the dreadful formality, the hideous mockery, of which she

had not understood a word, the man who had brought her into the court took her out. The moment she was outside the court she found herself surrounded by friends. Mrs. Bellew had got her in her arms, and her lover was by her side.

They had bailed her out.

She had been committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court, but bail had been applied for and accepted. Mrs. Bellew and Derek between them bore her through the dreadful purlieus of the court to a carriage that was waiting for her outside.

There was very little said on the way as they drove back. She did not understand what had happened: how should she? She had never heard of the Central Criminal Court before in her life. She would not have comprehended what it meant—the committal for trial at some far-off time, and the bailing out. She would not have understood, in her bewildered state, if they had explained it to her.

She had an impression as she drove back, a vague impression, that it was all over, and that she was free.

It had all been a mistake, a hideous mistake, but it was all over now, and she was free.

Something happened on the way back from the police-court. The carriage stopped at a low door in a deserted street. It was a dark, foggy November day, and Edith could not recognise the place; she could only see a few yards before her. They had stopped at the door of a church, but the fog had swallowed up the steeple. She got out obediently; it did not matter to her where she went, if they were with her. She would not let go of Mrs. Bellew's hand; she clung to her like a child.

'It is all right, dear,' Mrs. Bellew whispered to her encouragingly; 'it is the only thing he could do. If he had been my son, it is what I should have wished him to do.'

Still, Edith did not understand.

When she passed beneath the low door into the dark gloom of the church, she looked round in vague alarm.

'What is it?' she said tremulously—'what?'

Her lover had drawn her arm tightly in his, and he was hurrying her forward, and Mrs. Bellew was holding her hand. They drew her on between them until they reached the chancel, where some lights she saw were burning on the altar.

Then, for the first time, as they paused before the chancel rails, Edith understood it.

'Oh! what is this you are doing?' she said, turning to her lover in sudden affright. 'You would not marry me after that, Derek?'

'Darling,' he said, his voice shaken with emotion he could not control, 'darling, why speak of it any more? Whatever is past, let it be over and gone. Whatever may be in the future, you will have me to bear it with you. It is my place to defend you—to protect you against all the world.'

Derek was calmer than she was, though his face was pale and his lips were working.

Edith hesitated for a moment, and then she looked appealingly to Mrs. Bellew, who was standing by her side.

'Tell me what to do,' she said helplessly, in a voice of eager entreaty; 'tell me if he *can* marry me, after—after what has happened?'

'If he has faith in you, of course he can marry you. It is the right thing for him to do. You must give him the right to protect you.'

'Darling,' he said, and the tones of his low voice thrilled her, and seemed to reach her heart, 'I have faith in you. I believe in your innocence as I believe in Heaven. Whoever is guilty, it is not you. Whatever you have to meet in the future, we must meet it together. We must never again be divided, Edith.'

She did not understand what he meant by that reference to the future; she only knew that he believed her innocent of the shameful thing that had been imputed to her.

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While Derek was speaking, the priest had come out of the vestry, and he was standing inside the altar-rails.

Trembling, but still dry-eyed and calm, she got through the service. She did not break down until the last—until it was all over ; and then they had to bear her, weeping hysterically, into the carriage that was waiting outside.

Edith and her husband left Dover, *en route* for the Continent for their honeymoon, a few hours later in the day. Their happiness had not been long delayed ; but it had been sobered —and saddened.

There had been nobody present at the wedding but Mrs. Bellew and the clerk of the church. All the preparations that had been made were wasted. The wedding breakfast had been cleared away untouched ; and the cake, crowned with a beautiful temple of Hymen in white sugar, was hidden away in a dark cupboard under the stairs. A great deal

of money had been wasted on these foolish things that might have been better employed, and no good had come of it. The ravishing toilettes of the bridesmaids had been wasted, too; at least, nobody had seen them, and the beautiful satin gown of the bride had only been put on to be taken off again—never, never to be worn again.

Edith left all her gay clothing behind in Lowndes Square; she could not bear to take any of it with her. It had cost her so much, and the sight of it filled her with inexpressible loathing. She could not bear to take with her on her wedding journey any but the old dowdy clothes that she had worn at Nunwell. She had ceased to care what people thought of her. She did not want to be admired; even the admiration of her lover—he was still her lover—was nothing to her: she only wanted to be loved.

He would love her more in her old gowns than in her new—her new, which had been

bought at such a price! she told herself with a shiver.

They were far away from England when the news of the wedding became known. Captain Stanhope had sent it to the papers in due course—the *Times*, and the *Guardian*, and the *Court Journal*, and the *Morning Post*. He had made no secret of it. The first notice his father had of his son's wedding was the announcement in the columns of the *Guardian*.

There was real grief and lamentation in that distant West Country rectory. The girls were loud in their indignation; and the mother, poor lady! subsided into a passion of weeping when the intelligence reached her, and refused to be comforted. Derek's father did not join in the general outcry; he went away by himself, and shut himself up in his study all the morning, and when he came out again some hours later, the girls declared he looked years older—that his hair had gone quite gray.

This, no doubt, was a pardonable exaggera-

tion ; but his friends remarked that there was a stoop in his shoulders after that sad day that they had never seen in them before. He had done so much for his son ; he had practised all sorts of self-denial in order that Derek might have the same advantages as the others, and this had been his reward.

There was consternation, if not dismay, in the house of Edith's relatives at Kensington. Her seven female cousins shrieked in chorus when the news of her marriage reached them. They could not understand how a man could be so mad. They did not give Edith's bridegroom credit for sanity ; they thought he must have gone, as they expressed it, 'stark, staring mad.' There was no other way to account for his infatuation.

A great many people at the time shared the same amiable belief. No one could understand how a man in his senses could marry a woman with this dreadful suspicion hanging over her. It went, perhaps, to prove that the days of

chivalry were not quite over. An instance is required now and then, once in a generation, to show that the old noble spirit has not quite died out. When it flames up quite unexpectedly amid unheroic surroundings, the world shrugs its shoulders and turns away with a laugh. It always laughs at the things that it does not understand. It did not understand Derek Stanhope standing by the woman he loved in her misfortune. It called his devotion by one of its ambiguous names: it called it 'quixotism.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

DORA RUNS AWAY.

Dora Tremlett's husband was not quite frank with her. It was not his nature to be frank. He did not tell her that he had caused Edith Darcy to be arrested on the charge of stealing her diamond necklace.

He had been up in town a week, and he did not return to Cheltenham until the day before the wedding. When everything was quite settled about the arrest of Edith, he went back to join his bride. The week in town had been chiefly spent in the company of detectives. He had received certain information, and he had set the police on a clue that he held, or

was supposed to hold; at least, he had directed their inquiries in a certain direction. Before the end of the week a sufficiently strong case had been made out to induce a magistrate to issue a warrant for the apprehension of Edith Darcy on the charge of theft.

The time when the arrest should be made had been arranged with diabolical cruelty. There had been every opportunity of arresting her before; but the time had been chosen with deliberate intention. The inhumanity of the act was without parallel.

Dora only learned these particulars the day after the wedding. Mrs. Bellew wrote to her daughter the full account of Edith's arrest, and she implored her, as the jewels were hers, to withdraw the charge.

The letter did not reach her until the mid-day post; it had not been written until late the night before; her mother had been too agitated by the events of the day to write earlier. Dora took the letter at once to her

husband. She could not wait a minute. It was not an auspicious moment to go to him on such an errand. Captain Tremlett usually spent the morning over his cups, and by noon he was well drunk.

He had been drinking deeper than usual this morning, and he was drunk an hour before his time. He had the newspaper before him, with the account of Edith's arrest in it, which he had just been reading when Dora came in. The air of the room was reeking with the fumes of spirit and thick with tobacco smoke. Dora would not have had the courage to go to him in his den at any other time, but to-day her anger and indignation gave her courage.

'Oh, Lionel! what is this?' she said, laying her mother's letter on the table before him. 'Did you know, did they tell you, they were going to do this cruel thing?'

He did not take up the letter she had thrown down in her anger before him; he was much too drunk to have read it if he had.

He laughed a mocking, triumphant laugh.

'You've heard of it, then?' he said in his thick, unsteady voice. 'A fine piece of business, isn't it? The finest thing I've heard! Caught her coming down the stairs in her wedding toggery, with the bridesmaids all waiting and the carriages at the door!'

He chuckled to himself, as if it had been a joke—a capital joke.

'You knew of it, then?' Dora said, in a voice breathless with indignation.

'Knew of it!' He laughed again at the joke; it seemed to tickle him immensely. 'Knew of it? I should rather think I did know of it! They wouldn't have thought of it if I hadn't put 'em on the scent.'

'Then it was you—*you*—who charged her with it?' Dora cried, her round, childish eyes dilating, and her breath coming quick and hard.

'Yes, my dear, it was I who managed it; there is not another man in the world who could

have arranged it so well. But I won't take all the credit of it; you shall have your share. It was done in your name.'

'In my name!'

The horror in her voice—the horror and loathing—almost sobered him.

'In your name, my dear; they were your diamonds, not mine. The charge is made out in your name. I am only coupled with it as your husband, you know.'

He laughed his loud, harsh, idiotic laugh, and glared at her from under his eyelids with a mixture of fury and triumph.

'No, no, no! You can never have done this cruel thing in my name, Lionel! You could never devise this wicked scheme to injure a woman who had never hurt you in her life—because I loved her—to make me miserable! Don't tell me that the man I have married could have the malicious cunning to do this wicked thing! I will not believe—I cannot believe—that there is such inhuman cruelty in man!'

Dora was not afraid of him now. She confronted the big drunken bully with her head erect, and her small figure drawn up to its full height, and her eyes flashing.

He had no idea that there was so much spirit in her; for a moment his coarse nature cowered before her. He could not meet the blaze of indignant anger in her blue eyes.

'Ah!' he said in a tone of triumph, taking up a full glass by his side, and pouring the raw spirit down his throat—'ah! I've touched you at last! I thought there must be a tender spot somewhere, and now I have found it. I've got you now; it's something to think I've got you now!'

His dark, flushed face was burning and glowing, and his eyes under his heavy brows were scowling at her. She could not think what she had done to make him hate her like this—to provoke the evil passions of his nature to such fiendish acts.

She could not understand; she did not under-

stand till long after, and then the miserable knowledge came too late.

'And you have planned all this cruelty—you have ruined an innocent girl—to make me unhappy?' she said, in a voice thrilling with horror and loathing.

She did not seek to conceal her loathing, her disgust, aversion, contempt, for the drunken wretch before her. She had forgotten all about the vows she had made on that unhappy day when the rain was pattering down on the chancel roof.

'Ah, I've got you now, my lady!' he rambled on, not taking any notice of her anger—'I've got you now! None of your fine high and mighty airs for me! I'll crush all the spirit out of you before I've done with you. I've found out how to do it!'

Dora shivered.

He had been drinking all the morning, and his face was flushed, and there was a wild red light in his eyes, like a danger-signal. It was

no use standing there talking to him. He was not accountable for what he said. No man in his senses could say such things. She must wait until he was sober, until the fumes of the spirit he had been drinking had passed off.

Dora put out her hand to take up her mother's letter, which was lying open on the table before him. He saw the action, and seizing her by the wrist, he wrenched the letter out of her hand, tearing it into a dozen fragments. The attack had been so sudden—it had all been the work of a moment—that she did not know that her wrist was hurt until she had left the room. She went upstairs with her heart bursting, and a dreadful singing in her head. She was too hot and angry to cry. She generally cried after a scene with her husband, but she was too angry to-day to cry.

She sat down to think. It was dreadful to feel that Edith was in prison, and that nothing was being done to release her. She wanted someone to advise her; she was here in a

strange place, and had no one but her maid to go to. Parker came into the room while she was sitting there trying to think, and realizing how lonely and helpless she was.

'Good gracious! what have you done to your arm, Miss Dora?' she exclaimed, when she caught sight of Dora's swollen wrist.

It was not only swollen, but there were dark discoloured marks imprinted on the tender flesh.

'My arm?' she said, with a sudden pink coming into her face. 'Oh, I hurt it, I believe.'

It is, of course, a woman's duty to shield her husband. It is her first duty to suffer and be silent, not to parade her wrongs before the world. It would not have availed Dora if she had taken the world into her confidence. However dreadful her lot might be, she told herself, she had to bear it. There was no escape.

'Then, whose are those black finger-marks, I'd like to know?' the serving-woman said, with

fine scorn. 'The Captain's been up to his tricks again, I can see! It was your poor shoulders the other day—they are black and blue still—and you wouldn't have said a word if I hadn't found it out; and now it's your arm! I told you then, Miss Dora—I gave you fair warning—if it happened again, I'd write to my mistress.'

Parker always spoke of Mrs. Bellew as her 'mistress.'

'Oh, this is nothing; it does not matter,' Dora said wearily. 'If this were all—if it were only I who had to suffer—I shouldn't mind; but he has found out a new way to torture me, Parker, through those I love. He has invented a more refined cruelty. *He has put Edith Darcy in prison;* he has charged her with stealing my necklace.'

'Miss Darcy in prison!' Parker repeated.

She was much braver than her mistress—she was not afraid of the Captain—but she turned white to the lips.

'He had her carried off to prison in her wedding clothes, just as she was starting to church. Oh, there never was anything so cruel, so inhuman; and he has only done it to torture me!'

'How do you know? When did you hear?' Parker asked eagerly. 'I thought Miss Darcy was married yesterday.'

'She was taken to prison yesterday, just before the wedding, when the house was full of guests. She was taken from *our* house—that is the cruel part—and—and she thinks that I have done it, that it is I who have brought this cruel charge against her,' Dora said in a voice full of passion and tears.

'Don't you trouble, Miss Dora; she knows you too well to think that. She knows who's at the bottom of it. But you haven't told me how you heard. Perhaps it's only a tale he's made up to make you suffer; perhaps it's only a tale like all the rest.'

Dora shook her head.

'Mamma has written and told me all about it. She is dreadfully upset and indignant; she says I must make him withdraw it. I—I—as if I had any power over him! As if he would do anything for my sake! It was mamma's letter that he was snatching away from me when he hurt my wrist; he wanted to destroy it. I think he would have been glad if he could have rent me to pieces as he rent the letter. He looked so evil, so dreadful, that I came away. I was frightened, I dared not stay; I had never seen that look on his face before.'

Dora shivered as she recalled her husband's words and looks; her hands were clasped before her, and her small white face had a strained, hunted look on it that was pitiful to see.

'If you'd take my advice, ma'am, you wouldn't stand it a day longer. You'd go back to your mamma. There are lawyers enough in London who'd take it up, an' see you had your rights.'

'You mean I ought to see a lawyer about Edith?' Dora said eagerly. 'Of course I ought to see a lawyer! I can do nothing here. Oh! Parker, do you think we could get away?'

Parker nodded. She could scarcely trust herself to speak.

'He would never hear of it. I'm sure he would not hear of it.'

'I shouldn't ask him,' Parker said grimly.

'He would kill me if I were to go away without telling him; I should never dare to come back. If you had seen his eyes, Parker, you wouldn't wonder that I dared not do anything to anger him——'

'That's just where you are wrong, ma'am, begging your pardon; you are too much afraid of him. You haven't any spirit of your own.'

Dora sighed.

'Oh, you don't know! you don't know!' she moaned, wringing her hands.

'I only know this,' Parker said in a most unfeeling way, 'that if you sit here all day

weeping and moaning, that won't get Miss Edith out of prison.'

To this Dora could make no reply; but a swift glance of intelligence—of hope or fear—passed between her and her faithful serving-woman, and Parker nodded her head, and went quickly out of the room muttering to herself.

When, two hours later, Captain Tremlett had ridden off on his gray mare, the carriage was brought round for Dora to take her usual afternoon drive. She did not go alone to-day. Parker was ready dressed when she came down the hotel stairs, and some luggage was already on the top of the carriage.

'What does it mean? where are we going?' Dora asked helplessly.

'It means that you are going up to town to release Miss Edith,' Parker said promptly.

'But I have not told Captain Tremlett that I am going; I have left no message,' Dora said in a voice of dismay; but she got into the

carriage, nevertheless, and at a sign from Parker it was rapidly driven away.

'You can send a telegram from the station—there will be plenty of time to send a telegram; and you can write when you get up to town.'

'When I get up to town?'

Dora suffered herself to be driven to the station, and to be put into a carriage. She did not make any resistance; she was more anxious to get away beyond the reach of her husband than Parker was to carry her off; but she did not give expression to her feelings.

She sat silent in the corner of the railway carriage watching the fields flit by—the green fields, and the long lines of gray stone hedges dividing them—the cattle grazing—the white cottages with the smoke curling up into the blue, and the rooks cawing in the tree-tops.

She was too full of her own thoughts to see these familiar things, though she was watching them with her sad, anxious eyes. Her mind

was far away; visions of the happy past, of the sorrowful, terrible present, of the dark, doubtful future, rose before her. She could not realize that she was going home, that in a few hours she would have her mother's arms once again around her. She was filled with a fearful dread of her husband's anger when he should discover that she was gone—a dread that amounted almost to panic. She would have got out at the first station and gone back by the next train if Parker had let her. She had the greatest difficulty all through that miserable journey up to town to keep her from going back.

If she had not kept reminding her mistress that it was for Edith's sake that she had undertaken the journey, she would have gone back at least a dozen times on the way.

'We shall be too late to set her free to-night,' Dora said, as she sat there with her white face pressed against the window-pane, trembling and irresolute.

'You can see the lawyers to-night,' Parker said encouragingly. 'I don't know that I won't see the lawyers myself.'

'You! what could you want to see them for?' her mistress asked.

'I don't know. Perhaps I might be able to throw some light on it. The detectives are not half sharp enough. They should employ women. Women are ever so much sharper than men in finding out things; they can put two and two together better. I'd rather take a woman's opinion than a man's. There wouldn't be so many mistakes made if they employed women. A woman would never have thought of Miss Edith; she'd have thought of everybody else before she'd have thought of her.'

Dora was interested, and she looked round quickly; she had been watching the long gray fields slipping by, and the telegraph-posts, and wondering if her husband had come back from his ride—if he had got her message—if he had started in pursuit of her.

'I—I don't know that I ought to mention it, but when innocent folks are accused, it is time to speak. You mustn't attach any importance to what I'm going to say, Miss Dora; there mayn't be anything in it: most likely there's not. I shouldn't have breathed a word if Miss Edith hadn't been took to prison.'

'But you were away when the loss of the necklace was discovered, Parker; how can you know anything about it?' her mistress asked in her sad, hopeless voice.

'It's only what I think, and I've thought a good deal about it since; perhaps I ought not to speak—there mayn't be anything in it.'

'I think if you suspect anyone, if you can throw any light upon the dreadful affair, you ought not to let an innocent person suffer a single moment,' Dora said with a sob.

'It was about the keys I was thinking,' Parker said, dropping her voice to a confidential whisper—'the keys of the iron safe in my mistress's dressing-room. Do you happen to

remember who brought them into her room the night before the wedding, when your mamma was in bed ?'

'Edith stayed behind to lock the safe, after we had put the presents in, while I went to mamma's room to wish her good-night—it was our last good-night—but she did not bring the keys in The new maid was waiting at the door with them when I went out. She had waited outside until I had said good-night to mamma. I was in the room a long time, I remember, and I was crying when I came out.'

'And she had been standing outside the door with the keys all the time ?'

'I suppose so. She was standing there when I went out.'

'And you were in with your mamma ten minutes ?'

'I was in with her longer. I cannot say how long—it was so hard to tear myself away, to feel it was the last time—it might have been half an hour.'

'And Patience was waiting outside with the keys all the time?'

'I suppose so; she was there when I came out.'

'Then, it seems to me she had a better chance of taking the necklace than anyone else.'

'Patience! Oh, Parker!'

'I don't say 's she's got it, ma'am; but she had a better chance of getting it than anyone else. I shouldn't have thought so much of it if there hadn't been other things. There was a tale about her, I heard, when she came. She told me it herself. She had left her last place, and had come to live down in the country, to get away from a man. He wouldn't give her any peace in town, and she had come away to escape from him. She was praying he mightn't find her out. But he had found her out, and he had followed her down to Nunwell. A strange man was seen hanging about the place for a week before the wedding, and I

heard that they had been seen in the shrubbery together after nightfall.'

'How do you know it was the same man, Parker?'

'I heard all about it from Grason, the housemaid. She was in the servants'-hall one day when a man who was working at Fryston came over with a message for the Captain; it was while he was staying at Nunwell. While the man was waiting in the hall having some lunch, Patience came in with a bowl of flowers in her hands to change the water. When she saw the man sitting at the table, she dropped down in a dead faint, and the bowl was smashed to pieces on the floor. It was the old Worcester bowl in the drawing-room that your mamma set so much store by.'

'Poor thing! what did she do when she came to herself?' Dora said.

'The man took himself off before she came to, but she let fall some words as she was coming to herself that showed he was no

stranger to her. I don't like to speak ill of anyone, but I've my doubts about Patience. I wouldn't have breathed a word about them—there mayn't be anything in them after all—if it hadn't been for poor Miss Edith.'

'I wonder what the man was to her, and why she was afraid of him,' Dora said thoughtfully. She was thinking what she would have done if her husband had come upon her suddenly—whether she, too, would have fallen down in a heap upon the floor and shivered the Worcester bowl to atoms, as Patience had done.

CHAPTER XIX.

TO SAVE A SCANDAL.

Dora was at home again at Nunwell. Her mother had taken her back with her. There was nothing to keep Mrs. Bellew in town after Edith's wedding. Nothing could be done until the trial, which would not come off for several weeks, and she wanted to be back in Herefordshire. After what had happened in Lowndes Square, London had become hateful to her.

Dora had seen the lawyer whom Captain Stanhope had engaged to defend Edith, the day after her arrival in London, and she had signified her willingness, her earnest desire, to withdraw the monstrous charge which she

understood had been made without her knowledge in her name. As her husband's name was coupled with hers, and the diamonds stolen were heirlooms, it was not possible to act on her instructions alone. There was nothing to be done but to wait for the trial.

Dora's maid Parker had also been interviewed, but the lawyer did not seem to attach any weight to her statement. He regarded it as servant's gossip.

Dora had gone up to Nunwell under her mother's wing. She had not exactly run away from her husband, but there was a breach between them. Captain Tremlett had not forgiven her going up to town without his permission. He had not chosen to answer any of her letters, her humble little letters, and he had not followed her up to town as she had feared he would. He had considered himself an injured *parti*, and he had indulged in a fit of the sulks. He was still in Cheltenham, drinking deeply, and nursing his wrath,

when Dora went back to Nunwell with her mother.

The subject of her husband's cruelty, and his dreadful habits, had not been discussed openly between mother and daughter. There are some subjects upon which a wife must be silent. Mrs. Bellew was fully aware that Dora's marriage had been a mistake, that it was an ill-assorted union that could bring her nothing but misery in the future, without any special explanation of the exact nature of her unhappiness.

Mrs. Bellew knew enough of the poor child's wretchedness without tearing her heart-strings by dwelling on the miserable details. She had seen Dora's swollen wrist, and the livid marks on her arm, and Parker had kept nothing back. She thought her mistress ought to know. It was time for someone to interfere.

The poor mother had shaken her head when the indignant waiting-maid had said that it was impossible that her dear little mistress could return to her husband.

'There is no help for her, Parker; she must go back to him if he orders it. She must obey him, whatever happens. We can do nothing to help her.'

'Oh! you don't know his cruelty, his wickedness—how he takes a delight in torturing her. If you knew what it was, ma'am, you would see that it was impossible. Miss Dora ought not to be allowed to return to him; a sweet, pure-minded, gentle creature to live with such a man as that! If she were my child, I'd rather see her dead in her coffin; I'd thank God every day that she was dead, rather than see her living with that man!'

Parker could not speak more strongly.

Mrs. Bellew could only moan and wring her hands. She could never, never forgive herself for bringing this dreadful doom upon her child; but she was powerless to help her. This hideous mockery of a marriage—a marriage without any love to cement it—had only been brought about to satisfy her pride. She

had thought only of Dora's position—what a great thing it would be for her to be the head of the family! She had considered nothing else. A marriage without love on either side; two lives—such opposite lives—bound up together! —Oh, it was horrible!

Regrets were useless now—were worse than useless. Heaven and earth could not help her; if her husband ordered her to return to him, return she must. She had no alternative.

This was how her mother put it, though her heart was bursting with shame and agony.

'We cannot take her away from him,' she said, 'unless he renders it impossible for her to go back.'

All this had been said in London, when Dora had first come back, and her mother had marked the change in her. The change was so great that it broke her down whenever she looked at her.

All Dora's fresh, girlish brightness was gone, and there was a look of suffering and patience

in her soft eyes that went to her mother's heart. 'It will be different,' she told herself, 'when she gets back to Nunwell; the associations of her home will bring back her old self.'

Before Dora had been at Nunwell a week, her husband came to claim her.

He drove up to the house unexpectedly one misty November night, and his mother-in-law had to take him in. She had to make some show of welcome for Dora's sake.

The poor lady did not know how to receive him. She was more distressed than Dora, who, under her mother's protecting wing, met her husband with some show of courage.

'I did not think you would come so soon, Lionel,' she said, with an unusual flush on her pale cheeks, and a tremor of agitation in her voice and frame which he could not have helped remarking if he had had eyes for anything. 'Fryston will not be ready for another fortnight; we did not expect you until the workpeople had gone.'

She did not say anything about her flight.

Her little hands were trembling as he took them in his ; he must have felt how they trembled, how she shrank away from him.

'It would never be ready unless I came down to hurry them on,' her lord said ungraciously. 'I dare say you wouldn't have cared how long they were about it ; you are glad of an excuse to be here. For my part, I want to get into my own house.'

'It is quite natural that she should wish to be here,' her mother said quickly. She was hurt, exasperated, and her feelings were scarcely under her own control.

Her son-in-law did not choose to answer her. He had not come down to quarrel with her ; he had come down to take his wife away. He did not reproach Dora for running away, now that she was under her mother's roof ; he seemed to have forgotten it for the time, or was saving it up as the subject for a future complaint. He was gloomy and taciturn all through that first

wretched dinner, and when it was over he took himself off to the billiard-room to smoke for the rest of the evening.

Mrs. Bellew lay awake all through that night listening, and she came down to the breakfast-table the next morning looking pale and haggard, after the anxiety and the bitter reflections that had robbed her of her rest.

There were no screams to disturb her, no high voices raised in conjugal dispute, proceeding from behind that closed door. Whatever form the cruelty of Dora's husband had taken on that first night beneath her mother's roof, she had certainly not screamed, and fled to her in her terror for protection and help.

Captain Tremlett rode over to Fryston after breakfast. He did not, according to his usual custom, sit drinking till noon ; he started quite early for Fryston, to make preparations, as he told Dora, for returning home ; he was not going to be kept out of the house a day longer.

He did not return to Nunwell until late in

the evening, until the preparations were completed, when he returned to fetch Dora home. He had brought a carriage with him—one of the carriages from Fryston—and a groom with the Tremlett livery was on the box. He had come to fetch his wife; he would not wait for dinner—dinner was waiting for them when they got back, he said; he had come to take Dora away at once.

'But surely the place cannot have been got ready in this short time!' his mother-in-law urged tremblingly. She did not know what she feared.

'It is as ready as it's likely to be for some time,' he answered surlily. 'If I can put up with it, I suppose my wife can.'

She did not know what to say; she could not urge any plea to hold her daughter back. It was clearly Dora's duty to obey her husband, to follow him to the end of the world, if need be.

'I wouldn't let her go with him to-night,

ma'am, for all the world!' Parker said when she got her mistress alone. 'I don't like the look in his eyes. The place isn't ready for her—it isn't fit for her to go into; and the servants have not come down. He may murder her in the night in one of his fits, and there'd be nobody near to call.'

This was not very reassuring.

'Whatever happens, I can't keep her back,' the poor lady said, wringing her hands.

Dora was not so disturbed in appearance as her mother. She had put on a brave front for her mother's sake; she would not for the world have let her see how frightened and reluctant she was.

'I shall come over and see you to-morrow, mamma,' she said, trying to keep the quiver out of her voice, as she stood in the hall wishing her good-bye. 'We are so near, it will be nothing to run over; we shall see each other often now.'

Mrs. Bellew took her child in her arms and strained her with a sudden fear to her bosom.

'Good-bye, my darling, good-bye; if—if you should want me—if it is more than you can bear—let Parker——'

She could not finish the sentence; Captain Tremlett was waiting for Dora outside, and he was calling to her, as he had called to her on his wedding-day:

'Are you ready? Are you coming? Do you know the horses are waiting?'

It was a raw, foggy November night, and when Dora stepped across the threshold the damp mist seemed to swallow her up.

Mrs. Bellew could not see the carriage-lamps as they plunged into the mist, but she heard the sound of the horses' hoofs on the gravel, as they died away in the distance, with a dreadful sinking of heart, and then she went back to her desolate hearth to weep and bemoan her folly. It was her wicked ambition, she told herself, that had brought this misery on her child. She had sold her child for rank and position. She had not thought of her happiness; it had

not been taken into account. It had been all arranged for her; Dora had had no voice in the matter, except those few broken, inarticulate words she had breathed at the altar, when the rain was falling on the chancel roof.

Dora did not come back the next day, but a letter was brought over from Parker to her mistress by one of the workmen employed at Fryston after he left work. It was the man who had frightened Patience out of her wits the day that she broke the Worcester bowl.

She had recovered from her fright now; he no longer frightened her out of her wits. While her mistress was reading the letter he had brought over, she was walking with him in the shrubbery. It was late for a girl to be out on these misty November nights in a dark wood with a strange man; there was not another maid at Nunwell who would have stayed out so late, and strayed so far from the house at such an hour. When her mistress rang for Patience an hour later, she had not come in, and when

she did come in she was white and trembling, and not fit for anything.

Mrs. Bellew did not notice the girl's pale face and her strange manner; she had other things to think of. The letter from Parker had filled her with vague alarms. Dora had not been taken to Fryston. She had been taken to a lodge, which had been hurriedly prepared for her, at the farther extremity of the estate. It was only a keeper's lodge, and there was no proper accommodation; it was not at all a fit place for her. Parker wrote only a brief note speaking of the discomfort and the lack of attendance, and the unsuitability of the place; but she did not say anything about her little mistress or her husband. It was a cautious letter, and it was sent in a clandestine way. Mrs. Bellew, reading between the lines, arrived at the conviction that Parker, the brave Parker, was writing in fear; that she dared not express herself more plainly lest her letter should miscarry, and fall into hands it was not intended for.

Mrs. Bellew was not only angry and indignant, she was sick with terror; she dared not trust herself to think what might happen to her child in that lonely lodge, with no one near to appeal to for help. She lay awake all night worrying and wearying, and full of vain reproaches.

Her sorrow and regret seemed to mock her, they had come so late. If only she could have foreseen in time!

As early as she dared to go, Mrs. Bellew drove over to the lodge where Dora had been carried. It was on the other side of the park, in a damp, unhealthy situation, with undrained land around it, and a dense fir-copse rising up behind. It was not at all the place for a delicately-nurtured woman; it was the essence of cruelty or thoughtlessness to have brought Dora there. It was a chilly November day when Mrs. Bellew drove over, and a raw mist hung over the wet fields, and the yellow autumn leaves were falling thickly on the ground, and the songs of the birds were hushed.

She found Dora in the little bare sitting-room of the lodge, shivering over an unwilling fire. She was sitting very close to the fire, with her hands on her lap. She was not reading or working ; there were no books or papers in her prison. She had come away in a hurry —she had brought nothing with her—and she was here, in this desolate place, with nothing to do.

Dora jumped up when her mother came into the room, and threw her arms around her. Her eyes were red, as if from weeping, and for the moment, in the surprise and joy of seeing her mother, she lost command of herself and clung to her with a wild energy that told its own tale.

'My darling, my darling!' the poor mother faltered ; and then, in spite of all her brave resolutions on the way, she broke down. 'I did not think it was so bad as this. I had no idea he was going to bring you to such a place, or I should not have let you go,' she said

indignantly, when she could say anything at all.

'Oh, this is nothing, mamma, if it were only this!' the poor child sobbed; she had lost control of herself, and was weeping in her mother's arms. 'I could put up with this; it will only be for another week, and then the house will be ready.'

'Captain Tremlett ought never to have brought you here; a week in this place will kill you. You must go back with me, Dora.'

Dora shook her head.

'I could not go away without—without Lionel's consent, mamma,' she said with a sigh. 'I must not set myself up against him again; it—it is only far worse for me. I must bear it—I must learn to bear it. It will not be long before we go to Fryston, and then I shall have another room to go to. I shall be able to get away from—the sight—and the sound——'

Dora shuddered; she could not help shuddering when she recalled what she had gone

through in that room, and a blush of shame dyed her cheeks. She could not speak of these things to her mother without shame and confusion. She withdrew herself out of her tender, clinging arms, and dried her tears. She had remembered what for a moment she had forgotten—her wifely duty to suffer and be silent.

'My poor love!' her mother cried, half weeping, half angry. 'You cannot, you shall not stay here to bear this. He ought not to expect you. I will wait and see your husband, and reason with him. What would people say if they knew he had brought you here?'

Dora smiled—a faint little smile.

'I don't think he would mind that, mamma; he—he is past that. I don't think anything you can do, anything anyone can do or say, will avail; it will only make things worse. I have found out that it is better to be patient and bear it.'

This was all Mrs. Bellew could get from her;

it was better to bear it than to complain. Complaint and interference only brought her more suffering. It was better to put up with the horror and the wickedness—to put up with it and ignore it—than to complain.

The poor mother went away heart-broken; but before she went away she saw Parker alone for a few minutes.

'He is just awful,' she said in a whisper to her mistress, when she got her outside the door, before the carriage came up; 'he ought to be put in an asylum, and locked up; he is more like a wild beast than a man. He keeps her a prisoner here all day, and won't let her go out of his sight. There'll be something dreadful happen if someone doesn't interfere.'

There was no one that Mrs. Bellew could apply to for help in her trouble without making her daughter's wrongs the theme of every idle tongue, and creating a scandal in the neighbourhood. There was only Sir Bourchier who could interfere, and, at the risk of making a

division in the family, she wrote to Sir Bourchier when she got back. She would have gone to him if she could, but she dared not leave Dora, even for a day, without help at hand. She did not tell Sir Bourchier the whole truth, but she implied that he had not been quite frank with her at the time of the marriage. He knew, or he ought to have known, something of his son's habits, and he had kept the knowledge to himself. She implored him to interfere and save her child.

Sir Bourchier Tremlett was an old man; he was now in his second childhood. He had married late in life, and his son, with his gloomy ways and his violent habits, had been a great trouble to him. He was just now congratulating himself upon having got him safely married, upon the trouble being shifted to another pair of shoulders; he had only now settled comfortably down into the slumbrous apathy of old age—when the dream was suddenly broken in upon by Mrs. Bellew's

letter. It was a troublesome matter; it was not really his business; Mrs. Bellew had given her daughter to his son with her eyes open. Hundreds of mothers would be glad to have the chance she had had; hundreds of girls would have married him, and—kept silence. There are always two sides to a bargain; one can't have everything, and Dora had got all she had bargained for. She was the head of the family, and very soon she would be Lady Tremlett; she had nothing to complain of. He did not, considering all this, feel at all inclined to interfere. He would not have interfered if Ermyntrude, the eldest of his elderly daughters, had not suggested that Lionel and his bride should be invited to stay at Castle Hill until Fryston was ready for them; it would be better to put up with any inconvenience in order to save a scandal.

CHAPTER XX.

CASTLE HILL.

The immediate fruit of Mrs. Bellew's interference was the visit of Dora and her husband to Castle Hill. He would surely be better, she told herself, in his father's house. Among his own friends, with so many prying eyes about, he would not dare to ill-treat his wife; and he would not be able to indulge in his horrible habits. Surely there, if anywhere, he would be under some feeling of restraint.

'I think it is the best thing that could happen,' her mother said as she wished Dora good-bye. 'You will have his father and his sisters to fall back upon—if—if you need them.'

She did not speak very hopefully.

'I don't know, mamma; I don't think anything will make any difference,' Dora said with a sigh. 'But you must not worry yourself about me. I am getting used to it; I am braver than I used to be.'

Her lips were quivering, she could not keep back the tears from her eyes, though she strove to speak cheerfully; then the carriage drove off, and Mrs. Bellew, looking after it through her tears, saw her small white face at the window trying to screw up a wan reassuring smile.

There was some truth in what Dora had said to her mother in parting; nothing seemed to make any difference. Within a week she was back again at the keeper's lodge. She had come back in a hurry without any warning. Something had happened at Castle Hill, and Captain Tremlett had brought back his bride the next day.

There had been a scene, a distinct scene,

beneath his father's roof, and he had hurried his bride away to escape the consequences.

The occasion for scandal Miss Ermyntrude was anxious to avoid had occurred during the brief stay of her brother and his bride at Castle Hill. The household had been aroused in the night by a sound of high voices and hysterical weeping in the room occupied by Captain Tremlett and his wife, and Dora had burst out of the room and fled screaming down the dark corridor, pursued by the infuriated bridegroom; she had sought refuge from his violence in her sister-in-law's room. There had been no explanation given of this shameful scene, and the head of the family had departed betimes the next morning, taking his wife with him.

The first intimation Mrs. Bellew had of her daughter's return was a hurried note she received from Parker the following day. It reached her quite early in the day, while she was dressing; it had been brought over by one of the men employed at Fryston, on his way to work.

Parker implored her mistress to come at once ; but she did not say what had happened. It could not be anything very serious, she reasoned with herself, as she hurriedly put on her bonnet. Her fingers were trembling so, that she could not tie the strings, and her maid had to come to her aid. She had slipped out of the room while her mistress was reading the letter, and she had had a few hurried words with the messenger.

'I don't think I'd go alone, ma'am,' the girl said nervously, when she had fastened on her wraps, and had persuaded her mistress to drink a cup of tea before she started ; 'it mightn't be safe for you to go alone. If the Captain's broken out, there's no saying what he'll do. It would be safer to take Williams.'

Williams was the indoor servant who acted as butler ; being single-handed, he could not often be spared to go with the carriage in the morning.

'Broken out!' Mrs. Bellew had heard the

words before, applied to drunken vagabonds in the village who beat their wives; but to apply them to Dora's husband! Besides, what could this girl know about him? Patience reddened furiously when questioned; she did not mean anything, but she thought it would be safer if her mistress would take Williams.

When the carriage reached the lonely lodge at the edge of the wood it was still quite early. The white mists were lying still on the undrained water meadows, but the sun was shining above the tree-tops, where the rooks were still cawing. It was so early that they had not yet started on their business for the day. The anxious mother, looking eagerly from the carriage-window, saw the feeble thread of white smoke curling up above the trees from the low chimney of the lodge long before the house was in sight. The sombre pine-wood rose behind it, and the melancholy gray mists lying about the park seemed to swallow it up. It did not seem possible that Dora could be there.

Before the carriage reached the lodge it drew up suddenly. The coachman had stopped in obedience to a signal from someone walking in the road. It was Parker, coming towards it in haste, and Williams—he had come with the carriage, after all—had jumped off the box to open the door for her to speak to his mistress.

She had a shawl thrown over her head, and was breathless with running when she reached the carriage-door.

'Go back,' she cried, 'go back! You must not be seen so near the house. He is watching for you; I don't know what will happen if he sees you. You must wait at the bend of the road, out of sight of the windows of the lodge.'

The coachman had caught her words, and he turned round and drove quietly back to the place she indicated. It was strange how the servants seemed to understand; they knew all about it. Williams let down the steps of the carriage for Parker to get in and speak to her

mistress, and when she was in he closed the door upon her, and discreetly turned his attention to the misty landscape.

'He has broken out,' Parker said under her breath; 'he has been raving like a madman all the night; if we had not taken the knives away, he would have murdered her.'

'My poor child! my poor child!' was all the distracted mother could say.

'You must take her away; you must not let her stay with him a single day longer. Another night, and it will be too late. Oh, you don't know what we have gone through the last two nights; only a few frightened women alone with a madman!'

'Where is she? You have not left her alone with him?' Mrs. Bellew cried, jumping up. She wanted to go to Dora's aid at once, but Parker detained her.

'He is asleep now, downstairs, and I have locked her in her room and brought away the key. If you come to her you must come softly,

without being seen ; he must not know that you are here.'

Mrs. Bellew followed Dora's faithful handmaid silently through the wet lane—her heart was too full to speak ; and Williams, at a sign from Parker, dropped down on the other side of the hedge, and was lost to sight.

Parker led the way into the lodge, pausing in the narrow entry to point a warning finger at the closed door behind which the master of the house was sleeping. Mrs. Bellew could hear him breathing heavily, and muttering in his drunken sleep, as she stood on the threshold. She turned away with a shudder, and followed Parker softly up the stairs.

The room that she led her into was the principal room of the lodge, and looked out over the park.

It was in a strange state of confusion when Mrs. Bellew went in. Everything was upset ; the furniture was thrown about, as if there had been a struggle, and a mirror above the mantel-

piece was smashed. For the first few seconds after she had entered the room, and Parker had locked the door behind her, she did not see Dora. She had not come forward to meet her as she was wont to do; she could not have come forward if she would. She was crouched up in a large chair beside the bed, with her arm in a kind of sling, and a handkerchief steeped in eau-de-Cologne tied round her head; her face was white and drawn. It did not look like the same Dora.

Mrs. Bellew flew to her side with a startled cry—she could not help the cry escaping her—and took the poor little martyr in her arms.

'My love! oh, my love!' was all the frightened mother could say.

Dora could only moan in reply; she was past weeping, and she let her head fall on her mother's shoulder.

'What has happened? He—he surely has not—struck you?' Mrs. Bellew gasped.

There was a livid mark on the girl's cheek,

beneath that wet bandage, and she could not move her arm.

'It is nothing, mamma,' she said, trying to keep the pain out of her voice. 'I—I have strained my shoulder; Lionel was excited last night; he did not know what he was doing, and —and I struggled with him, and strained my shoulder; it is not much.'

Parker tossed her head. She had no patience with her mistress trying to cover up her husband's violence.

'It has made you look very pale,' her mother said, trying to speak calmly; 'perhaps it is more than you think. You ought to have it examined. And that mark on your face—did you get that in the—the struggle?'

'I did not know there was a mark,' Dora said, a faint colour coming into her pale cheeks. 'I have got a headache with staying up all night, and Parker has put on some eau-de-Cologne.'

'That does not account for the mark,' her mother said with tightening lips. She was

striving hard to keep her composure, not to let her indignation get the better of her—to think what to do for the best. It was so hard to keep calm with the spectacle of that bruised face and the disabled shoulder before her.

'I may have hurt myself in struggling; it is only a bruise; I did not feel it at the time. It is nothing to speak of, mamma.'

'Why were you struggling with your husband?' her mother asked severely. She took no notice of that explanation of the bruise.

Dora hung her head, and did not make any reply at first. She was very calm, not excited at all; perhaps the excitement had worn off.

'Lionel had been drinking late, and he did not know what he was doing; he was not quite himself. He thought there were some evil things in the room, and he was defending himself against them. He broke the mirror because he saw his own reflection in it. We had to struggle with him, Parker and I, to keep him from doing himself or others an injury. There

were no men here to restrain him, and he was more violent than usual.'

'He was mad—quite mad with drink and delirium,' Parker said shortly; 'he was not accountable for what he was doing. If I hadn't come in when I did, he would have killed her. He was kneeling on her chest, and when I took her away from him, he nearly wrenched her arm off. I believe he's torn all the muscles of her shoulder.'

'Oh, my poor darling!' her mother moaned, kneeling down beside her chair, and taking Dora's thin little hand in hers; she had not remarked before how thin it had grown. 'You must come back with me now, Dora. I shall not go away and leave you in the power of that wicked man again. It is no longer your duty to stay with him. He has outraged all laws of humanity and decency. You must come back to Nunwell with me, and let him come after you and claim you if he dare!'

Mrs. Bellew was fully roused now. She was

like a lioness defending her cub—her little wounded cub; the maternal instinct of defence and protection was fully roused.

'I cannot go away. I cannot leave him—he is my husband still—until there is someone here to look after him. He does not know what he is doing. When he awakes he may be violent again; he may do himself some injury if no one is near to prevent it.'

Parker shrugged her shoulders impatiently. She had no sympathy with her mistress's scruples. She would not have been much moved if he had done himself an injury—himself, and no other.

'I will send Dale over'—Dale was Mrs. Bellew's own medical attendant—'and I will telegraph to Sir Bourchier. When he is in this state he ought to have his own people about him,' her mother said in a tone of conviction. 'They must have seen this sort of thing before, and they know what to do. Sir Bourchier must send someone to look after him.'

Still, Dora was not to be persuaded to leave her husband.

'When Dr. Dale comes, I will be guided by what he says, mamma. If you knew the state he was in, you would not ask me to leave him.'

Nothing would shake her resolution; she would not fail in her duty to the miserable wretch below. She was deaf to her mother's prayers and tears, and Mrs. Bellew had to go away and leave her with the bandage round her head in that locked room. She left Williams behind, in case he might be wanted, and she drove off in haste to summon Dr. Dale, and to communicate with Sir Bourchier.

It was impossible to keep the secret any longer; everybody would know it sooner or later; there was no longer any possibility of avoiding a scandal.

Dr. Dale had to be told. Certain explanations had to be entered into. It is always best to be frank with one's medical adviser; Mrs. Bellew could not have concealed anything from

him if she had desired. He had been called in to see two patients, and Dora's wounded arm and bruised cheek had to be accounted for.

He did not arrive at the North Lodge a moment too soon. Captain Tremlett had awoke out of his drunken sleep, and there had been another scene of violence. He had tried to break open that locked door behind which his wife was hidden, and he would have succeeded if Williams had not been there to get him away. Williams was with him in the room below when the doctor arrived. They could hear him raving and cursing within when the carriage stopped before the door of the lodge.

The doctor came away from the interview with a grave face.

'It is not safe for him to be left with women,' he said; 'when the paroxysm is upon him he has the strength of ten men, and he is not answerable for anything he may do. There are some grooms here, and Williams, who will

remain until proper attendants can be sent for. His wife can do no good by remaining.'

Still, Dora was unwilling to leave her husband.

'I knew he was not in his right mind,' she pleaded; 'he would not have done it if he had been in his right mind.'

She was in a weak, exhausted state, and the shoulder was much inflamed; all the muscles seemed to be torn away. She would want nursing and care for weeks.

She went away with them at last; if it had not been for the agony in her shoulder, and her helplessness, she would not have gone then. Before she went, she said a few words to her husband. She would not go without seeing him first, without telling him that she was going. She was glad to remember afterwards that she had spoken to him.

'I am going to Nunwell with mamma for a few days, Lionel,' she said tremulously, coming over to the couch on which he was lying. He

was lying back on the couch, with his eyes closed, breathing heavily, and his face was deeply flushed. 'I could not go away without saying good-bye.'

She was bending over him; she thought he was sleeping, but perhaps the sense of her words might reach him. In a moment he had sprung up, and seized her by the shoulder—the poor wounded shoulder—and was holding her in his iron grip.

'Going away?' he repeated—'going away?' The men came between them, and separated them; they did not know what injury he would do her. They had not interfered a moment too soon; she sank insensible into the arms of the man who released her. The pain in her shoulder had been more than she could bear, and she had fainted.

CHAPTER XXI.

TREMLETT *v.* STANHOPE.

EDITH STANHOPE'S trial at the Central Criminal Court came on for hearing in December. Her husband had broken it to her by degrees, that she would have to appear again to answer to the shameful charge. It was not all over yet; the worst had to come. She was not afraid of the worst now, if he were beside her to face it with her.

Captain Stanhope had expected until the last moment that the case would be withdrawn; he could not believe that any man in his senses would go on with it. Up to the eve of the dreaded day when Edith was to surrender to

her bail it had not been withdrawn. Dora had used every argument to induce the lawyers to throw up their briefs, but without avail. They would do nothing without her husband's instructions, and Captain Tremlett was not in a state to give instructions. He was shut up in one of the newly-decorated rooms at Fryston with a keeper. If he were not exactly mad, he was under restraint. It had been found necessary to put him under restraint after that attack of mania at the lodge. Any other man would have been put in an asylum; but the owner of Fryston was suffered to live in his own house in the charge of keepers. A certain latitude was allowed him in his intervals of reason, but to all intents and purposes he was treated as a madman: he was not allowed to stir a foot without a keeper.

Dora and her mother had come up to Lowndes Square for the trial. She had not returned to her husband's roof since that dreadful day when she had parted with him at the keeper's lodge.

She had been weak and ill ever since; her nervous system had sustained a shock; she was not fit to go back and go through it all again.

'When the trial is over I shall go back to Fryston,' she said to her mother when they were coming up to town. 'A wife's place is with her husband; if he is ill, whether in body or mind, there is all the more reason why she should be with him. I don't think I ought to have stayed away so long.'

Mrs. Bellew did not dissuade her; it would be time to reason with her when the trial was over. Her anxiety just now was for Edith. From what she had heard, she was afraid the trial would go against her.

She could not think what would happen if the jury were to find Edith guilty. There was no saying what evidence would be brought against her, and she had no means of disproving it; she was relying alone upon her innocence.

Edith had only come back from her honey-

moon at the last moment. She had been reluctant to bring the happy days to a close --to cloud them with this dark shadow that was hanging over her. She could not give up a single happy hour; she wanted to wring every drop of joy out of the cup before she gave it out of her hands. It was only this unwillingness to yield one jot or tittle of her happiness that held her back, that kept her from coming up to town to 'prepare her case' before the inevitable hour. Her aunt, Miss Gunning, had been ill during her absence—she had not been expected to live day by day—but the tidings had not hurried her back. The old woman had never been much to her; and she had her own life to live. She could not have spared an hour of the present for all the great-aunts in the world.

The dreaded day arrived at last. It could be put off no longer. It seemed to Edith, who had lain awake all night watching for it, that she had been expecting it, waiting for it, all her life. It was a sad, gray December

morning, with a shivering, wet wind sighing through the murky streets—a chill, depressing day, without light or heat. It was so dark when Edith was brought into the court that for the first few minutes she could not distinguish anything clearly. She saw dimly, in the dull December light that came through the high windows, the grave faces of her accusers.

The court was crowded. It seemed to her, standing at the bar, that it was paved from floor to roof with human faces — hard, indifferent faces. She could not see in one of them, in that hasty glance round the crowded court, the faintest show of sympathy. She did not expect sympathy; she did not know why she looked for it.

There were some formalities to go through which she did not understand at all; and someone was speaking in the well of the court below: the counsel for the plaintiff was opening the case.

She listened to him with a vague sense of wonder; she could not help listening with strained attention to the dreadful tale he was telling.

The defendant, Edith Stanhope, formerly Edith Darcy, was a personal friend of one of the plaintiffs, Mrs. Tremlett, and had acted as her bridesmaid on the day that the diamond necklet in question was missed. It was alleged that the necklet had been last seen in her possession, that she alone had had access to it, and that after it was missed it had been traced to her possession.

Edith turned round sharply when this statement was made, and glanced at her husband, and a flush of indignant scarlet came into her pale cheeks.

Traced to her possession!

Captain Stanhope was standing next the dock; he would have stood within it if he had been allowed. He smiled back reassuringly when Edith looked round. Of course they

must have had some evidence, or supposed they had some, or they would not have ventured to bring this charge against her.

The defendant, the learned counsel went on to say, had left Nunwell, the residence of the bride's mother, the day after the wedding. She had left by an early train.

There were many trains from Hereford to London during the day, and she had gone by the first. She had stolen out of the house at daybreak, when all the household were asleep, and had left by the early train. There did not seem to be any reason for this secrecy and haste. She had no business to transact in London. She had gone straight through to St. Oswald's, and had reached her destination some hours earlier than she was expected.

This was quite true, but Edith could not see what it had to do with the case.

The lady's position at this time, he went on to say, was peculiar. She was engaged to be married. She had come up to town with the

avowed intention of buying her wedding clothes. It would be shown that, if not at this time actually in monetary difficulties, she was in great need of money. She was crippled in her resources. She did not know where to go for money to buy her wedding clothes.

The angry flush deepened on Edith's face, and her dark eyes grew darker and brighter. What did the man mean by talking about these things in public? What had her trousseau to do with all these people? Why did not Derek stop him? Surely he could stop him!

He smiled back at the mute appeal in her dark eyes, at the hot indignation in her beautiful face. His smile calmed her and reassured her, and she set herself again, with some show of patience, to listen to the charges they were bringing against her.

She had no money on the 20th of September; and on the 23rd she went up to town for the purpose of raising money. Her movements on that day had been traced. The jury would

hear for themselves what had taken place on this particular day. The lady had come up to town without money, and during the day, before she returned to St. Oswald's, she had purchased a great part of her trousseau, and had decided on certain articles of furniture.

She had paid several visits to town on subsequent occasions, and each time she had added to her trousseau, and spent considerable sums of money in furniture. He was prepared to show that the defendant had no money of her own to meet this outlay, and that she had not received any advance from her trustee.

At this stage Edith looked round at her husband; she did not meet his eyes eagerly as she had done before, but she raised them to his with a mute, deprecating appeal that went to his heart. He smiled back reassuringly; nothing could shake his trust in her.

Her pecuniary circumstances could not be too much dwelt upon, as they supplied the motive that was wanting for the theft of the

diamonds. These, and the great inducement there was in the prospect of her approaching marriage, and the desire to stand well with the friends of her husband, who were opposed to the match, would furnish the motive for the act.

Derek Stanhope did not know how he had patience to listen to the insolent insinuations of his wife's accuser. He could not trust himself to look at her. He seemed wanting in fealty, to stand idly by and listen to these cruel imputations.

It was perhaps quite as well that he had not looked round. He would have seen the dear face, that was strained in an attitude of eager attention, slowly whitening.

He could not attach too much importance, the counsel went on to say, to these facts; taken with other things, they proved strong collateral testimony in favour of the supposition that the accused had stolen the necklace, and made away with it to supply her pressing,

her urgently pressing needs. The onus would rest on the defendant's counsel to prove where, and by what means, she had raised the various sums of money with which she had paid for the articles purchased.

Derek Stanhope looked round at his wife with an eager look of relief that there was no mistaking. Of course she would be able to explain all this. It was a cruel charge to be built on such a fabric; but Edith did not look round. She kept her face averted; he could only see the beautiful profile, with all the colour gone from it, and the lines set white and hard, like a face chiselled in marble. Having proved the circumstances that led to the commission of the felony, the counsel was prepared to trace home the possession of the necklace to the defendant, and to call witnesses who would identify her as having sought to dispose of it.

At this stage of the proceedings there was a distinct sensation in the court; people were

pressing forward to get a better view of her face; and some were putting their glasses to their eyes, and an audible murmur had risen which drowned the soft, slow utterance of the counsel who was speaking.

Edith did not look at her husband; she was looking straight before her. She saw then, for the first time—she had not looked that way before—two kind faces that were raised to hers at the table below, round which the lawyers were sitting; two anxious faces, full of tenderest sympathy. They were the faces of Dora and her mother.

Hush!

A silence had fallen on the crowded court, and everyone was listening eagerly — Edith more eagerly than they all. What was this that he was saying, the soft-spoken counsel for the plaintiff, with his hard face turned towards her, and his plausible voice compelling the attention of the jury?

He was speaking of diamonds that a woman

—whom witnesses that he would presently bring forward would identify as the prisoner at the bar—had offered for sale; diamonds of unusual brilliance and size, which had been hastily and unskilfully removed from their setting.

He was prepared with a large body of evidence to prove the visit of the defendant to a firm in the City who dealt in these things, and of the sale of parcels of loose diamonds on several subsequent occasions; witnesses would prove the lady's signature to the negotiation in an assumed name, that the cheques were presented at the bank, and that the notes received in exchange for them were tendered at the Army and Navy Stores and elsewhere in payment for the wedding clothes and furniture purchased by the defendant.

Edith heard all this in the midst of a death-like stillness; she was afraid to draw a breath lest she should lose a word; she was straining forward with all-absorbing interest to catch with

greater distinctness the terrible words as they dropped from the lips of the learned counsel.

When the voice had stopped, she had a bewildered sense that everybody was looking at her with dreadful suspicion and abhorrence. The sea of faces massed up between floor and gallery were no longer indifferent; they were all looking at her with accusing eyes; they had condemned her already. Then, and not till then, she wavered as she stood; the ground beneath seemed to rise up to meet her, and the ceiling of the court came down; and all the faces piled up from floor to roof were swimming before her, like faces in a moving glass.

She would have fallen where she stood, swaying to and fro in the dock, if someone had not put out a hand to save her. The touch of the supporting arm seemed to revive her, and she steadied herself by the bench; but she did not look round.

One by one the witnesses for the prosecution came forward and proved all, and more than all,

that they were required to prove. Their testimony was overwhelming. All the detached bits of evidence fitted in and made a complete whole. There could not have been a clearer case.

Everything that the counsel had stated was proved to be circumstantially true. The defence, when its turn came, would not have a leg to stand upon. Even Edith's own witnesses were called to give evidence against her. Her trustee, Mr. Tulkington, was called to prove her visit to him at an early hour on the morning of September 23, and to state the object and result of her visit to him. She had applied for an advance of money, and the advance had been refused. Beyond the payment of her usual quarterly pittance she had not received any money from the trust-moneys he held for her benefit. He was not in a position, from the terms of the trust, to make her an advance under any circumstances.

At this part of the evidence Edith again showed signs of faintness; for a moment she

swayed backwards and forwards in the dock, and the judge desired that a chair might be brought for her. She did not accept the offer of a chair, though she had stood there for hours; for her husband's hand was supporting her. He had slipped it into hers when the evidence began to tell against her; and he kept it in his all through the rest of the day.

She had not the courage to meet the tender trust in his eyes, but she clung to his hand as a drowning man clings to a straw.

Dora sat in the well of the court during all the dreadful damning evidence, as witness after witness stood up, strengthening the chain that was drawing round the pale criminal in the dock link by link: for such marks of unhesitating devotion and chivalrous fidelity she would have been well content to change places with her.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON BAIL.

THE dreadful day was over. It had been lived through. Edith had lived through it once; she would live through it again and again, every day of her life. Every single event of the day, every word the witnesses had uttered, had been burnt into her mind. She could recall them each and all with terrible distinctness.

To the surprise of everybody, Edith had again been released on bail. The counsel for the prosecution had been instructed not to oppose the application. He had shrugged his shoulders, but he had no alternative but to

submit to the dictation of the plaintiff in the case, who was present at the table beside him.

Edith's counsel had asked for a remand, in order that they might procure the attendance of certain witnesses who would throw a different light on the case. The counsel for the defence, in view of the overwhelming evidence brought forward by the prosecution, had serious thoughts at one time of throwing up his brief. He had not been fairly dealt with. Certain facts had been suppressed. His client had certainly not come into court with clean hands. He had no idea what line of defence would be set up. Under these circumstances he was justified in asking for a remand.

The case was remanded for a fortnight. Edith went back in a cab with her husband. He led her out of the dock, supporting her as she stumbled blindly through the dimly-lighted passages to the side-door of the court, where a cab was awaiting her.

She did not speak to him once all the

way; she only lay back in the cab with her white, set face outlined against the dark cushions; and when he spoke to her she moaned. It would be kinder, he saw, to let her alone; the only thing that he could do to comfort her was to assure her of his love—his undaunted love, his unwavering confidence.

He could only enfold her with his sheltering arm, and pillow her tired head on his breast. His brain was in a whirl; he did not know what to think; but his heart never swerved for one moment from its loyalty.

When the cab stopped at the door of the lodgings they had taken in London—they had not taken the flat, after all — Edith went straight up to her room.

The woman of the house had not lighted the fire in her bedroom; perhaps she had not thought she would come back. She went up alone—she would not let him come with her—and she flung herself on the bed, and buried her face in the pillow.

He came up presently with some wine, and pressed it to her white lips. It brought the colour back into them, and a flush crept up into her pale cheeks, and her dark eyes seemed to grow darker and brighter.

'You heard what they said, Derek?' she said in a whisper.

He bowed his head; he could not answer her.

'*It is all true*,' she said desperately, in a voice that thrilled him with its anguish and hopelessness.

'True?' he said stupidly.

He could not say another word; there was a lump in his throat that was choking him. He put his arm round her involuntarily—he didn't know that he had done it—and drew her to his side.

Edith shrank from his protecting arm, and put him away with her trembling hands.

'Wait,' she said hoarsely—'wait. You do not understand. It is all true. I have deceived you. I have lied to you and to the rest. I am

a lying, shameful creature; I am not worthy to be your wife!'

Still he tried to put his arm around her. He was so slow-witted that he did not take in the meaning of her words.

'No, no, no!' she said with a shiver, 'never again; I am not fit to be your wife. God help me! It was for your sake I lied, Derek. I was mad. I thought only of my love for you; I did not think that it was wrong. I would not have brought shame upon you for the world, and to shield you I lied. Oh, God! how I have lied!'

Her agony was dreadful to see. She shrank from his arms upon the floor, and buried her face in her hands.

Derek stooped over her with words of endearment, and would have picked her up, but she shivered at his touch.

'I am not fit to be your wife,' she moaned in the fierce abandonment of her despair. 'I am a liar; I have woven such a network of lies

about my feet that I hardly know when I am speaking truth; and they say that I am a *thief!*'

What could he say to her to soothe her?

He could only assure her of his love. It did not affect him that all the world thought her guilty, that by her own confession she was unworthy.

He bent over her with his arms outstretched, his forgiving voice pleading in her ears — a man with a true, tender heart sorely tried; but she thrust him away from her; she could not bear to hear his voice; the pity in his eyes hurt her more than reproaches. A gulf seemed to be widening between them, and she would not take the kindly, forgiving hand that was stretched out to her across it.

There was nothing to be done but to leave her there till she came to herself. He put a pillow beneath her head, and folded some warm wraps around her, and gave her some bromide that happened to be at hand, and turned the lamp down low.

She was asleep, or seemed to be sleeping, when Derek came up half an hour later; the draught seemed to have taken effect, or she was worn out with exhaustion. He stole out of the room, closing the door softly after him. It was necessary that he should see the lawyer that he had employed for Edith's defence that night; he could not rest until he had seen him. He gave the woman of the house strict charge of his wife while he was away, and set out on his hopeless errand.

Edith heard the street-door close upon him, and his footsteps echoing on the stones of the square. There was a reproach in every foot-fall. She listened till his sad, accusing foot-steps died away in the distance.

Was it possible that he could still love her?

In her bewildered, agonized state she could not understand her husband's love being unchanged, his acceptance of the pain as part of his love. His forbearance and patience and

forgiveness added a keener sense of her unworthiness.

She did not think, as she lay there in her stupor, of herself; she thought only of her husband, and the shame that she had brought upon him. 'Oh! why had they condemned him to this prolonged misery and suspense?' she asked herself helplessly. 'Why had they deferred the hearing of the case, and spun out the thread of agony and shame?'

She had no defence to make, she told herself a hundred times. All that had been said was true. Her lame little defence would only provoke scorn and mockery.

It would have been better to have accepted her fate, to have received her sentence. The work of expiation would then have already begun. In anticipation she was looking eagerly forward to it; it would be a balm to her lacerated conscience to work out day by day, in suffering and sorrow, the expiation of her fault, if by any means she might by

painful steps attain hereafter to pardon and peace.

'I am not fit to stay with him!' she moaned, in the abandonment of her despair. 'I am not fit to sit by his fireside, to touch his hand! Oh, if I could go away—if I could hide myself until the trial!'

The thought took such possession of her that she could no longer lie there. She rose up from the ground, and with nervous, unsteady hands began to make some hasty preparation for a journey. She bathed her tear-stained face, and put back her dishevelled hair, and put on her wraps. She did not at all know where she was going.

A burning desire to go away possessed her —to hide herself and her shame; to creep away into a corner and die. The old animal craving was strong upon her—the unreasoning instinct to creep away somewhere and hide her wounds from curious eyes; a craving as old as the world, handed down from Eve herself.

'He could not wish me to stay—after—after what has happened,' she murmured as she went down the stairs.

The hall was empty, and a light was burning. She opened the street-door and closed it behind her noiselessly, and sped through the deserted Square with swift, stealthy footsteps. A soft rain was falling, and the rain-drops plashed upon her face, and the wet wind met her in a great gust as she turned the corner of the Square.

When Captain Stanhope came back half an hour later, he found the door of her room open, and his wife gone. The woman of the house, who had been downstairs eating her supper, had heard nothing. She had fancied once that she had heard the front-door close, but, on going upstairs, had found all quiet, and returned to her supper.

There was a letter for Derek on his wife's dressing-table—a blurred, blotted letter, explaining the reason of her flight.

'I could not live,' she said, 'and meet the pity in your eyes. It is better I should go away and suffer alone. If I live till this dreadful fortnight is over, I will not fail to come back in time.'

This was all—no intimation of where she had gone. She had disappeared into the blackness of the winter night, and had left no trace behind.

Edith had not gone very far. She had gone back to St. Oswald's. She had no other home to go to, and her wandering feet had naturally led her there.

It was midnight when she reached Gotham, and the house was shut up. The iron gates were closed, and the fly had to wait a long time outside till someone could be aroused to come out and open them. There was not one light in all the closed windows of the shut-up house.

'Can she be dead?' she asked herself, as she looked up at the darkened windows, while the cab waited at the gate.

It was like a picture of her future—the gloom and darkness and silence of that shut-up house. She would have to live her life alone, as her aunt had lived out *her* bitter, lonely, desolate life.

It was darkness within the house as well as without. When Edith stood cold and trembling in the hall, and the front-door had shut behind her, the darkness of the tomb seemed to be closing around her.

'Is my aunt still alive?' she asked fearfully.

'She is not expected to live through the night,' the woman said. 'She has not known anyone for days.'

Edith crept softly up the wide staircase, and past the door of the silent room where the old woman lay dying.

'You would like to go in to her, ma'am?' the woman said, pausing at the door.

'No, no; I will not go in,' Edith said hastily. 'I should only disturb her. If she is still living I will see her in the morning.'

She shrank away from the closed door. She

had gone through so much to-day; she had no power to go through any more. Mind and body were worn out. She could not feel any more, she told herself, as she laid her head on the pillow. Nothing that could happen to her now would affect her. She was conscious only, as she lay there, of a desire to change places with the worn-out old body and the flickering wick of life that was slowly dying out in the room at the end of the passage. The old woman was going to her rest—to her account, doubtless; but to her rest—whilst Edith had still her life to live.

Utterly wearied out, Edith fell asleep with the trouble and gloom closing round her.

When she awoke the next morning, Penfold was standing by her bedside. It was not quite light, a chill December dawn, and the woman was urging her to rise quickly.

'If you come now, Miss Edith, you will see the last of her. She was sensible a moment ago, and she was asking for you.'

Edith drew some wraps around her and followed Penfold to the end of the passage. There was a feeble light burning in her aunt's room, and the curtains of the bed were drawn back to give her air.

The poor worn-out old woman was propped up with pillows, but her head had fallen forward on her chest, and her eyes were closed; she did not see Edith standing there. The shadows were stealing over her gray face.

'Dear aunt,' Edith said, taking the damp fingers that lay on the coverlet in hers—'dear aunt, I am here—Edith: you were asking for me.'

The old woman heard her voice, but she did not open her eyes; it was another Edith who was present to her.

She was muttering to herself in a low voice, and Edith stooped over her to catch the words she was repeating; she had been repeating them, the woman said, all through the night. They were indistinct and ran into one another,

but Edith, leaning over her, with her ear to her poor lips, thought she caught the words: 'A —life—long—feud—a—life—long—feud;' and then a pause, and again, in a tone of entreaty: 'Edith, forgive—forgive!'

'The feud, whatever it was, is healed at last, dear,' she said, pressing the poor clammy hand she held in hers, 'and Edith forgives you. Edith's child forgives you in Edith's name. We have all need of forgiveness, God knows. The least we can do is to forgive one another.'

Her tears were falling on the hand she held in hers, and she dropped down on her knees beside the bed and repeated in her broken voice the most healing and uniting of all prayers, 'Forgive us our trespasses——'

Even while she was speaking, the fingers of the hand she held closed round hers with a gentle pressure and then relaxed. When Edith looked up, the two old servants were stooping over the pillow, busied in some noise-

less way, and Penfold led her weeping from the room.

The shock of her aunt's death, following so soon upon the trying ordeal she had just gone through, stunned her; her despair of yesterday seemed like an old tune come suddenly to an end, broken off in the middle.

When she got back to her room, past all those unshuttered windows, through which the new day was looking in at her, she could remember nothing but the scene she had just left.

She could but dimly recall the events of the past day; she could only think of the white figure stretched cold and motionless upon the great state bed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

'MY HUSBAND!'

Dora and her mother went back to Nunwell the day after the trial. There was nothing to keep them in London. Dora's tender conscience was pricking her for deserting her husband. If he were sick, her place was by his side. She would have gone over to Fryston the following morning had not something happened.

There had been a scare at Fryston only the day before. An improvement had taken place in Captain Tremlett's condition lately, and the watchers had relaxed their vigilance. The improvement had been so great that an attendant no longer slept in his room.

He was not an easy patient to have to do with. In his intervals of sanity he disputed the right to have watchers about him, and to have any restraint put upon his movements. He had been perfectly sane for some days past, and had returned to his former occupations. He was having the rooms fitted up for the reception of his wife. The boudoir that Dora was to occupy was his especial care. The beautiful old china that had been sent from Castle Hill was displayed here on dainty Sheraton tables and cabinets, and pictures by Greuze and Lancret hung upon the walls. There was nothing wanting to make the room complete—nothing but the presence of the mistress for whom it was prepared.

He would sit for hours in the day in his wife's boudoir, waiting for her to return, and he would allow no intruders across the sacred threshold.

He was sitting here one day as usual—the men who should have been looking after

him were elsewhere: they discreetly kept out of sight when their presence was not required — when an alarm was raised. When the keepers reached the apartment, their charge was no longer there. The room was empty—quite empty. He had thrown every article of furniture and china out of the windows, and was pursuing one of the gardeners who had raised the alarm through the grounds with a naked cavalry sword.

After this episode it was not considered advisable for Dora to join her husband at Fryston. Old trusted servants were sent from Castle Hill to look after him, and qualified attendants were in the house. Dora could have done him no good if she had been there, and her presence would only have excited him. Sir Bourchier wrote a very kind and considerate letter to his daughter-in-law, but he did not advise her to return to her husband. He begged her to make Castle Hill her home until the delusion had passed away. It would

pass, the doctors agreed, by-and-by—they did not say it very hopefully—but it might return at any time. The outlook was not a bright one.

Dora did not accept his offer. She remained at Nunwell with her mother.

Something happened on the occasion of their hurried return to town that they might be present when Edith's trial was resumed. Dora had waited anxiously—during the time for which the case was remanded—for a sane interval, in the hope that her husband might be induced to sign instructions to his counsel to withdraw the charge; but she had waited in vain. Until the last day—the day before the trial—the doctors had led her to hope that a change might take place in his condition. It had seemed hopeful in the early part of the day that Dora had fixed for her return to town, and she put off her journey until a late train. She put it off so late that she had to travel by the night-mail, which left Hereford

after midnight, and she did not get her husband's signature after all.

There was no alternative but to travel all night, if she wished to be in town in time for Edith's trial the following day.

It was too late to send a telegram to the servants in Lowndes Square. There were only two servants left there, as the house was shut up. One of the servants left was Mrs. Bellew's new maid. With her old faithful servant, Parker, about her, she did not want the services of the new maid; it was more as a pretext for getting her out of the way that she left her behind as housekeeper in charge of the premises in Lowndes Square.

The night-train from Hereford did not reach Paddington until five o'clock the next morning, and then there was a long cold ride through London. It was still dark when the cab drew up at Lowndes Square, and the coachman had to ring the bell two or three times before he could make anybody hear.

He made someone hear at last. Mrs. Bellew heard voices inside, unfamiliar voices, and when Patience opened the door, a man was holding a candle at the top of the kitchen stairs. He put down the candlestick and beat a hasty retreat when he saw the ladies standing in the hall, and Mrs. Bellew heard his slipperless feet pattering down the stairs.

'Who is that man?' she asked in a terrible voice, 'and what business has he here?'

Patience didn't faint this time, but she burst into tears.

'It's my husband, ma'am!' she sobbed.

'Your husband! How long have you been married?'

'I have been married three years, an' I've left him a dozen times. He always comes after me when I'm in a good place and gets me out of it. Oh, I wish I had never been born! I wish I had never seen him!'

It was the old story. There was not a single

detail missing. The foolish girl, following the example of her betters, had married a man she knew nothing about, and she had reaped the reward of her misplaced confidence. After putting up with his ill-usage and drunkenness as long as she was able, and parting with her clothes and the little money she had saved, she had run away from him. She had not been able to run very far; he had always found her out. He had found her out at Nunwell the day she broke the old Worcester bowl.

He had followed her up to town, and the housemaid having gone off to some festivity, he had stayed the night. She had not been able to get rid of him.

'He is my husband,' she said, weeping; 'wherever I am, he has a right to come.'

He did not retain the right to come to Lowndes Square very long. Mrs. Bellew packed Patience off at once, with a month's wages in her pocket. The cab that had brought her from the station took Mr. Venner and his wife

away. He was a shabby, dissipated-looking fellow, with a hang-dog air. He did not look at all like the possessor of a diamond necklace, as he struggled up the area steps with his wife's box in his arms.

CHAPTER XXIV.

'MY GRANDFATHER'S MINIATURE.'

A SAD week of darkened windows, of hushed footsteps treading softly outside a closed door, of men coming and going on dismal errands; a week of silence and rest and forgetfulness; a week to weigh the small trials of this life against the reward of all sacrifice and sorrow in the life to come.

Edith was left pretty much to herself during the week that followed her aunt's death. The trustees under Miss Gunning's will came down the next day, and put their seals upon everything, but they did not interfere with Edith.

Her uncle, Richard Darcy, came down with

his wife a few days before the funeral. Edith was too ill to see them. She was shut up in a darkened room, with the doctor who had been in attendance on her aunt coming to visit her twice a day. He had ordered rest, perfect rest, and Penfold was charged to carry out his instructions.

If Penfold had not been on the watch, Mrs. Richard Darcy would have broken in upon her. She would not believe that Edith was really ill; she did not hesitate to say that it was only a pretext for hiding away until her trial; and she expressed herself in no measured terms on Edith's having dared to return to Gotham with this dark shadow of guilt hanging over her.

If the trustees had listened to her, Edith would have been turned out at once; she would not have been allowed to wait until the funeral.

Mrs. Richard went over the house with her husband from cellar to roof. There was not a

room in the house that was sacred to her, not even the chamber where poor Miss Gunning lay in her coffin. She went through all the rooms and appraised the furniture, and settled in her mind what changes she would make when the house was hers. She was in such a hurry to begin that she could hardly wait for the funeral, and for the will to be read, and the necessary formalities to be gone through. She wanted to begin at once.

The place really wanted turning out from top to bottom. It was in a dreadful state of repair; the floors were full of dry rot, and the walls were damp with mildew, and the furniture was old-fashioned and shabby. There was a great deal to be done. The first, the very first, thing that Richard Darcy's wife decided to do was to turn out all those ridiculous glass cases of cats in the room that Miss Gunning usually occupied; the cats, live and dead, were to be got rid of at once.

Before she went away she excited Penfold's

indignation by proposing that Blue-Eye's aunt should be poisoned forthwith.

Penfold took the white, complaining morsel in her arms and carried her to Edith, for fear the woman should carry out her wish. The frightened, neglected little creature would not leave Miss Gunning's closed door all through that sad week, and once, when the door had been opened, the poor cat had crept in, and was found on the day of the funeral by the men who had come to bear her mistress away, keeping watch at the foot of the coffin.

She did not need any poisoning; she died the next day. Penfold declared she had died of a broken heart. If the lonely old woman had no one to miss her when she was gone, she had certainly been missed by a white cat with a ridiculous name.

Edith's husband came down to St. Oswald's two days after her flight from town. After a fruitless search for twenty-four hours, he had lighted upon the right track. He had not

lighted upon it by himself. He had been put upon the track by a detective, who had called upon him and offered his assistance. It was the detective Finch, whom Sir Bourchier had employed.

He had disappointed his patron's expectations; he had not succeeded in discovering the missing necklace. He had gone off on a different scent to the detectives at Scotland Yard; he had pursued his inquiries, as has been told, in an opposite quarter, but without results. He was as far as ever from finding the necklace. He came to Captain Stanhope two days after his wife's disappearance, and counselled him to fetch her back to town without delay. The worst thing that could happen to her would be for it to be known that she had run away. It would be equivalent to an admission of guilt. He had discovered Edith's whereabouts, if he hadn't discovered the necklace; he was sharp enough in some things.

Edith would not see her husband when he

came to Gotham. She sent a humble little message by Penfold: she was ill in bed; the events of the last few days had shaken her, but she would come up in time for the trial; whatever happened, she would not fail to come up for the trial.

'I think you should see him,' Penfold said, when she came back after delivering Edith's message. 'I never saw a gentleman take on so when he heard you were ill, and that you wouldn't let him come up to see you. It isn't the trial he's thinking of — it's you.'

But Edith would not be persuaded.

'I must wait till after the funeral,' she said. 'I could not go away and leave her; she will not be here long. This is my place until—until she is carried away.'

Derek Stanhope had to be satisfied with this assurance. He did not leave St. Oswald's; he put up at the Lion Hotel, which was not a hundred yards from the gates of Gotham

House, to be near his wife, and waited for the funeral.

Two days after, Miss Gunning was carried through the iron gates, followed by her nephew, Richard Darcy, and her trustees, and a few old tradespeople of St. Oswald's who had known her in the old days.

Edith's husband joined the procession at the gates; but he left it at the churchyard, after the funeral was over. He did not come back to the house.

He ought to have come back; there was no one so interested in the function that took place in that dark, gloomy dining-room after the funeral was over as he was.

Mr. Richard Darcy and the lawyers and trustees came back, and Mrs. Richard, who had come down from London in the deepest crape mourning, was waiting to receive them.

There was no one else to do the honours of the house. Poor Edith was in her room, crying herself blind over the Burial Service, which she

had been reading while they were away. She was in no mood to go among strangers.

The blinds were drawn up in the darkened rooms, and the wheels of life had begun to move once more. The will, which the lawyers came back to read, was dated some years ago, when Edith Darcy had been left an orphan on the old woman's hands. There were some legacies left to the children of her nephew, Richard Darcy; but the old house and its contents, and the bulk of her property, were left to her grandniece, Edith Darcy.

The unexpected always happens. Nothing could have been more unexpected than Edith's sudden accession to fortune. It did not move her as it would have done if it had come at another time; it had come too late. She seemed to be frozen by the events that had happened to her—to be indifferent to all that might happen to her now. She was an heiress with a banker's account; the old house, which had been her ancestors' before her, was hers.

If it had all happened before, it would have been so different; but now——

On the day of the funeral, after all the company had gone away—Mr. Richard Darcy and his wife in a great rage, and the lawyers and the trustees with their black bags and their papers—Edith had a visitor who desired to see her on important business.

It was the detective Finch, whom Sir Bourchier had employed to trace the diamonds.

The dull December day was closing in when Edith went down the stairs to see the man who had called at such an unfitting moment.

The lamp that usually burnt in the hall had not been lighted, and the staircase was full of gloom. She remembered the burden that had so lately been carried down it. She seemed to see the sad procession going on before her, as she came slowly down the stairs in the growing dusk, and to hear the halting footsteps of the

men; and a rustle stole behind her all the way. It was only her heavy skirts trailing on the stairs, but the rustle stole behind her like a whisper.

The detective had been shown into the dining-room, where the lawyers had met after the funeral. The chairs were still in the places round the table where they but lately had risen from them. It did not seem to Edith, in the exaltation of the moment, that they had really gone away. Their bodily presence was no longer here, but they did not seem quite gone in spirit. Edith fancied they were still there, sitting round the board, listening while the man unfolded his unwelcome business. She had seen the man before, and she knew what he had come about; it was not the first interview that he had had with her.

'I think you should lose no time in going back to town to prepare your defence,' he said, when she came into the room. 'I have called to offer you any help I can give you.'

'I have no defence to make,' Edith said sadly; 'all that they have said is true.'

'Exactly; but that does not prevent your getting up a case. The necklet has not been traced to your possession; it has not yet been shown that it ever was in your possession. The sale of a few loose stones does not prove the possession of the necklet. If you will tell me where the stones came from that you offered for sale, I will not trouble you any further. Forgive me saying it, but, if I am to be of any use to you, you must be quite candid with me; you must keep nothing back.'

Edith bowed her head; she had deserved this, and more. She had deserved that even such a common man as this should not take her word.

'The diamonds that I sold had nothing to do with Mrs. Tremlett's necklace,' she said, with some dignity. 'They belonged to a miniature I have—the miniature of my grandfather; it had a setting of diamonds.'

'If they were your own diamonds, why did you sell them under an assumed name?' he asked.

'Why? There were reasons why I did not wish my name to appear. It was not quite an assumed name. I had some right to it: it was my mother's name.'

'If I am to be of any use to you, you must tell me your real reason for concealing your name.'

She had no alternative but to tell him the truth.

'The miniature did not belong to me then; it belongs to me now—my aunt has left me everything; and—and I stole it from her.'

The man ought to have been shocked, but he did not seem at all disturbed by Edith's confession.

'That is very good evidence,' he said with a smile. 'You wanted the money; you had no other means of raising it; you were in a desperate strait for money, and, anticipat-

ing your ownership, you disposed of the diamonds before they came legally into your possession ?'

Edith bowed her head.

'I took the miniature, knowing I had no right to it—that probably I should never have a right to it. I was desperate, as you say ; I did not know what I did.'

'And, to hide your guilt, you sold the stones under an assumed name ?'

'I sold them under my mother's name. If I had sold them under my own name, and it had come to the knowledge of any members of my uncle's family, they would have prosecuted me as a common thief.'

'You were not on good terms with your uncle's family ?'

'I was at variance with his wife. She did not like my living here with my aunt. They were all jealous of me.'

'Was your uncle aware of the existence of the diamonds you sold ?'

'No one was aware of their existence. The trustees had taken away everything of value out of the house, and sent it to the bank for safety, years ago, when my aunt first went out of her mind. There was nothing left that they knew of for her to make away with. I discovered the existence of the diamonds by accident. They had been locked away for sixty years; they were of no use to anybody, and—and I wanted the money——'

This was Edith's only plea. They were of no use to anybody, and she wanted the money.

'But surely there was some record of them; someone must have known of them. Even had they been locked up so long as you say, there must have been some record of them. Are they mentioned in your aunt's will?'

'No details are mentioned in the will. I am left residuary legatee, after the legacies are paid; there is nothing said about the diamonds.'

The detective looked blank. It would be

hard to prove the sale of diamonds that were never known to exist.

'I should like to see the miniature,' he said presently—'the miniature of your grandfather, from which the stones were taken.'

Edith left the room, and returned presently with the gold locket in her hand.

'But this frame is perfect in itself,' he said, examining it closely; 'it has never had any other setting.'

Then Edith had to explain how it had been fixed into an outer frame of diamonds, a frame that had not originally belonged to it, and how it had slipped out of the frame in her hands, and some of the stones had fallen out.

'There is no mark of any outer frame,' he said, holding it under the light; 'it will be difficult to persuade the jury that it has ever had any other setting. The frame itself, from which the stones were taken, will be the only proof that we can offer. You have kept the frame?'

Edith shook her head and blushed.

'It was so broken,' she said, 'it was no use; I had to break it to get the stones out, and I sold it—I exchanged it, rather—for some silver boxes for my dressing-case. I had some bangles I did not want, and I sold them with it. The man allowed me the value of old silver for melting down, and I paid the difference.'

'How long ago did you get rid of it?' he asked eagerly. 'There might be some chance still of reclaiming it.'

'I got rid of it directly after I sold the stones,' Edith said, hanging her head, with her cheeks dyed crimson.

She was more ashamed of selling that trumpery frame than of disposing of the diamonds.

'You were afraid of being found out?' he said with dreadful candour. 'You got rid of it to prevent detection if the diamond setting was missed?'

Edith could only bow her head in silence.

'You have done what most people would have done. You have been too clever. You have cut away the ground from beneath your own feet. If we can get the jury to believe you innocent, it will only be by proving your guilt. You must be prepared to make a full confession of having stolen the diamonds from Miss Gunning.'

He went away, and left her overwhelmed with shame. She was a thief, after all. Though the diamonds were now hers, she had stolen them. The tissue of falsehoods which had been proved against her had been told to conceal the theft, and she would have to acknowledge them in open court. Was anything wanting to complete her humiliation?

When the detective had gone, Edith sat stupidly gazing into the fire, and wondering what more was awaiting her, what there remained for her to go through. So much had been crowded into the events of these few days,

that it did not seem she could go through any more alone.

She was wondering whether her husband would come; he had a right to come here now —it was her own house. She could bear whatever might fall to her to bear, she told herself, as she sat there before the dying embers in the grate, if he were beside her to share it with her; but she could not go through anything more alone. Oh, if he would only come!

Captain Stanhope had heard of his wife's unexpected accession to fortune within an hour after the will was read. Everybody in St. Oswald's had heard of it. Perhaps the fortune stood in his way. He never could understand why he had not gone over to her at once—he was not a hundred yards off—and taken her away. If it had not been for the fortune that had so suddenly fallen to her, he would certainly have gone to her after the funeral and taken her away from that gloomy house.

CHAPTER XXV.

FREE!

EDITH went up to town the next day. She went up with her husband; but she did not return to the rooms he had taken for her—the rooms where she had left all her things. She drove straight to a hotel. The trial would come on the next day, and she might not require its shelter another night. She did not look forward at all hopefully to the result of the trial.

Before she could be seen in town, she had to do some shopping—she had to get some mourning for her aunt. Among all the beautiful things she had selected with so much care

for her trousseau—the things that were left behind at the lodgings—there was not a single black gown. The hideous habiliments of mourning had not been included among her wedding clothes. She would have to wear mourning for her aunt a year, and by that time, if she ever wanted to put them on again, her dainty gowns would be all old-fashioned. The sacrifices she had made for them had been in vain.

She was wearing these garments of woe the next day when she stood again at the bar of the Central Criminal Court to answer the charges against her. Perhaps it was the unrelieved blackness of her mourning, contrasting with the haggard whiteness of her face, that gave her a look of age and suffering. She looked years older than when she had stood there last, and the mental agony she had gone through had left its lines upon her altered face. Whatever her sin had been, she had already paid the penalty of it.

The physical strain had told upon her strength; she was so weak that she swayed as if she would have fallen as she took her place at the bar. If it had not been that her husband, who was allowed to stand near her, held her hand in his, as he had done at the opening of her trial, she could not have stood there at all.

It was all over, she told herself, as she stood there before her accusers, with her eyes cast down, clinging to her husband's hand—it was all over; they would not listen to her defence; it would be vain to tell that idle story of the miniature and its frame of diamonds. She had not a tittle of evidence to support it. It was only adding shame to shame to repeat it.

They kept her so long standing there trembling, with her head drooping on her breast, and an oppressive, overwhelming sense of a great gulf yawning at her feet!

She could not think why they were keeping

her. If she had looked up, if the shame and agony that bowed her down had suffered her to look up, she would have seen that something had happened. The lawyers at the table were talking together with hushed voices and grave faces, and a whisper had gone round the court. Everybody was looking grave. The jury were leaning forward and whispering to each other, and the judge, who had taken his seat, was disturbed.

Edith saw nothing of this; she did not even heed the whisper that went round the court. She was only conscious of a dreadful agonizing suspense, and dumbly wondered why her sentence was delayed.

The whispering suddenly ceased, and a death-like stillness prevailed. Everybody in the crowded court was straining forward to catch what was being said. One of the barristers at the table was speaking. He was not speaking very plainly; he was strangely agitated. Edith could not think why he was

so agitated, and why the people were listening so eagerly. It could not be her sentence yet—or was the trial over? Had it already taken place, she unconscious of it? and was her sentence being pronounced?

Hush! What was this that he was saying?

Why was his voice broken and faltering?

He had a duty to perform, he said—an unexpected duty; an unforeseen event had happened. He was instructed by his client, whose name was coupled with that of her husband, Captain Lionel Tremlett, to withdraw the charge against the defendant. The charge would have been withdrawn in an earlier stage of the trial, if the plaintiff had succeeded in obtaining the consent of her husband to its withdrawal. That consent was no longer necessary; there was now only one plaintiff in the case. Captain Tremlett had that morning committed suicide.

Edith never knew what happened after. She had fallen forward on the dock, and had

been carried out of the court senseless. When she came back to consciousness, she was in a room at the hotel, and her husband was bending over her. She was still clinging to his hand as she had clung to it in the court. That clinging touch had drawn her back to the shores of life.

'It is all over,' he murmured, bending over her, 'and you are free.'

Free! but at what cost!

The unhappy man had escaped the vigilance of his keepers and had taken his own life. The precautions that had been taken had only been relaxed for a few seconds, and this had been the result. He died with no one about him but servants and keepers, and the dreadful creations of his diseased imagination. Dora and her mother were in town waiting for Edith's trial when the awful news reached them.

The poor little bride travelled back with her mother to Hereford later in the day. She

travelled back in a compartment reserved for their sole use; she shrank from meeting any curious eyes, from being seen and pointed at as a widow who could not weep. She would have given anything to have wept like other women—to have felt sorry—but the tears and the sorrow would not come at her bidding.

Perhaps it was the horror of it that stayed the channels of her tears, that had turned her into stone. But this was not the worst. She was afraid of herself, of her own feelings; she was ashamed to meet her mother's eyes. Only Parker understood her.

When they reached Nunwell, Sir Bourchier and his daughters were already at Fryston. Dora shrank from meeting her husband's relatives, and she could not bring herself to go beneath the roof where he was lying. When they asked her if she would like to look upon her husband's face in his coffin, she had to put a restraint upon herself to keep from laughing aloud.

'I'm so afraid I'm glad, Parker,' she whispered to her faithful serving-woman. 'I would give anything to be sorry, to weep like other women!'

'The tears will come by-and-by—come in plenty,' Parker said, to comfort her. 'You have not had time to forget. It isn't forgiving, it's forgetting, that's so hard.'

Parker had not got to the root of the matter. It was not a question of forgiving or forgetting; it had nothing to do with any sense of injury. There was no aching void to fill. Death had made no separation. Where there was no real union, there could be no separation, no sense of loss. It had been a *mariage à la mode;* while her husband held her, he held her by force; when he loosened his hold, she slipped out of it. She turned away from the remembrance of her married life with a shudder; she hailed her liberty, bought at whatever cost, with a spasm of relief. It had been a miserable mistake from first to last.

They carried the wretched man to Castle Hill, and buried him in great state in the family mausoleum. Dora was too ill to attend her husband's funeral. She was shut up in a darkened room, with some kind of hysterical attack that culminated in a fever. The sense of her freedom had been more than she could bear. When her husband was being carried to his grave, she had broken down in wild hysterical tears and laughter. She had called herself 'a hateful, hateful creature for being glad.' She had shocked everybody by her outspoken joy at her freedom.

'It is too dreadful!' the weeping women cried, stopping their ears; 'she cannot know what she is saying; the strain has been too much for her.'

Those who had witnessed that little scene on the occasion of her last visit to Castle Hill, when she fled screaming in the night through the darkened house, thought differently.

Human nature will not always be kept down.

They took her back to her mother's house as soon as she could be moved; she would not go to the home her husband had prepared for her. She would not set foot in Fryston.

'I should be always seeing him, mamma, if I went there,' she said, when her mother urged her, for form's sake, to go back for a time to the deserted house. 'I should hear his voice calling to me when anyone spoke; I should hear his footsteps on the stairs whenever a board creaked; I should never see a door open but I should expect to see his face. I can never, never go there. If you knew what I have suffered you would not ask me!'

Her mother did not ask her after this; she let her have her way. Her heart was sad enough, though it was at rest. It was a sadness, a pain, that lasted her all her life.

Her mother took her away after a time; there was no reason for keeping her there in the midst of sad memories. Whatever duty to her dead husband she had left undone must

remain undone for ever. She would not have brought him back if she could. It was not regret that filled her heart; it was only pain.

Dora went abroad till the spring. She saw strange places and strange faces; she tried her hardest to forget. Perhaps, if she had not tried so persistently, she would have forgotten more easily. It was the constant strain of trying not to remember, of shutting out the sights and sounds that, with weary iteration, presented themselves before her mind, that kept her from forgetting. She will forget by-and-by, when she has ceased to try not to remember—when other interests have come into her mind. There are so many interests in the world outside our personal sorrows and regrets.

Several things happened while Dora was abroad. Old Sir Bourchier Tremlett died. He did not long survive his son; the shock was too much for him. He never lifted his proud old head after the news reached him on that

miserable morning. The wretched man had not only wasted his own life; he had brought his father's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

There was no one of his own kith and kin to succeed Sir Bourchier; the title and the estate went to a distant cousin. Ermyntrude Tremlett and her sister left Castle Hill after their father's death, and their place was filled by strangers.

It is an ill wind that blows no one any good. The ill wind that wrought such desolation in the household at Castle Hill brought hope and fortune to a far-off kinsman, a poor briefless barrister burdened with an invalid wife and a dozen children. The good fortune had not come a moment too soon: it came soon enough to provide the boys with a University education, to give the girls a place in society, and to bring the faded roses back to the cheeks of the invalid mother.

It was hard work for the new baronet to

keep up the state of the old house during that first year, until the rents came in. Fryston, which belonged to the estate, and which Dora refused to occupy, was advertised to let, and the contents—the beautiful new furniture that Captain Tremlett had bought for his wife—were to be sold by auction.

There were two great posters hanging on the lodge gates, announcing the sale of the magnificent furniture of the mansion, and the effects of the late owner, when Dora and her mother drove past a few days after her return to Nunwell.

'I don't think you should have let his things be sold, Dora,' Mrs. Bellew said with a sigh, as she saw the posters of the sale on the gates. 'It would have been better to have kept them, or given them away.'

Dora shivered, and shrank back in her corner of the carriage.

'I would not have kept them for the world, mamma! Ah! you don't know. It is better

for everything to go into the hands of strangers. They can have no memories for them. I could not bear to have a single thing about me that reminded me—of—of——'

Mrs. Bellew asked her no more.

Everything belonging to the late owner of Fryston was to be sold with the furniture and horses and carriages. Whips, and guns, and fishing-tackle, and books—there were not many books—and a fine collection of sporting pictures, and all the odds and ends that men usually gather about them—nothing was to be kept back. People could not understand how the family could allow such things to be sold. It would have been so much better taste, under the circumstances, to have—well, to have——

Nobody could quite say what would have been the best thing to have done with them—under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'KNOCK IT DOWN!'

EDITH had gone back to her aunt's house after the trial. She had gone back alone. She was free to go where she would; and she had chosen to go back there. She was free; the charge against her had been withdrawn, but the dark cloud of suspicion still hung over her. It had never been raised for a moment; it had only been put aside. The world still believed her guilty. She could never, never hold up her head again; she could never take her place by her husband's side in society: she would only shame him. After all she had done, the miserable shifts she had resorted to for his

sake—that he might be proud of her; that he might never regret the choice he had made; that his friends might never have cause to reproach him—her presence would only shame him.

'I have brought enough sorrow on you already, Derek,' she said, when she was able to say anything, after she was taken back to the hotel, and he urged her to go abroad with him for a time, till the affair of the trial had blown over. 'You must let me take my own way; you must not ask me to come back to you until I can come without bringing shame and dishonour with me. When you can prove my innocence, before all the world, of the cruel charge that miserable man brought against me, then you may come and claim me.'

She would not be moved from this determination; nothing that he could urge would move her.

'Your own people still believe me guilty,' she said, sobbing on his breast; though she desired to leave him, she still clung to him.

'They would never receive me with this dreadful suspicion hanging over me. You must prove to them that I am innocent, Derek. You must fight my battle for me; you know what a weak, wicked woman I have been; you know what dreadful lies I have told, what a mean, despicable thing I have done——'

'Hush! we will never, never talk about it again,' he interrupted, folding her in his arms, and stopping her wild accusations with his trembling lips. 'My darling, you must forget all this; it was for my sake. Shall I ever forget it was for my sake?'

He could not persuade her, though he assured her of his unalterable love, his forgiveness and forgetfulness of all that was past. Her fault—if fault it were — was not only forgiven; it had become the source of an unhesitating confidence in the future which no subsequent events could ever mar.

What other assurance of forgiveness and reconciliation could a woman desire?

It would have satisfied most women, but it did not satisfy Edith. She accepted the assurance of her husband's love and confidence with touching meekness and humility. Her pride was already in the dust—she could not be humble enough ; but she would not be moved from her decision. When he could prove her innocence before all the world she would return to him. She would not bring to him a tarnished name.

And so they parted. Derek Stanhope took his wife back to the old house at St. Oswald's that had been her home so long. He bid her farewell at the gates ; she did not ask him to enter, though the house was now her own. He left her with a benediction, with the tears shining in his eyes and his lips quivering. He was a dull, stupid fellow, but he loved her with a true man's love that no mistakes of hers could ever mar.

Though she sent him away, it was she herself who was most unhappy.

She shut herself up in the old house, as her aunt had done before her. Nobody visited her; she would not have seen people if they had. She shut herself up between the high brick walls, and lived her solitary life, as old Miss Gunning had lived hers for sixty years.

The dark wintry days went by, and the spring came and found her still there, living her sad, lonely life. She could have desired no punishment more than this, her own self-inflicted sentence, the voluntary expiation of her fault. But through all these weary days and weeks nothing had been heard of the missing necklet.

Her knight-errant had not been idle; he had left no stone unturned to trace the lost diamonds, and he had offered a big reward.

He had not been working alone; the detective Finch, whom Sir Bourchier had employed, had been working with him, and they had drawn the *cordon* of evidence into a very narrow circle. Every clue had been followed out, and every scrap of evidence had been sifted. There was

only one conclusion to come to. If Edith Stanhope's husband had not been slow-witted, he would have arrived at it before. It was in keeping with the chivalry of his dull, honest nature to refuse to think evil of his enemies.

'I am going down to Hereford to-morrow,' the detective said one day when he came to call upon him; 'and I may go over to Nunwell. Have you any message for the ladies?'

'No,' he said; 'no, I think not, except that you might tell Mrs. Tremlett that my wife is still at Gotham—that she still keeps to her determination not to return to me till the necklace is found.'

Dora Tremlett knew this without telling. She had written to Edith regularly while she had been abroad—it had been her sole comfort and consolation to write to Edith—and she had begged her to leave her seclusion for a time, and come to her at Nunwell.

She could not understand Edith's trouble; compared to hers, it was a trouble light as air.

What was the condemnation of all the world to the undying stings of self-accusing conscience? She would have given everything she possessed in the world to change places with her.

The detective Finch went down to Hereford the next day, and drove over from there to Fryston. He did not go to Nunwell first to deliver his message; he drove straight to Fryston.

There were a great many people coming and going through the lodge gates on that day; it was the day of the sale at the house. There were so many things to be sold, besides 'the costly and valuable modern and antique furniture,' as the auctioneers phrased it, that they could not all be sold in a day. The sale began with the outdoor things, the garden and the stable requisites, and moved by slow stages through the house. It had reached the boudoir on the third day—the room which Captain Tremlett had spent so much time preparing for

the reception of his wife—the room where he had thrown the chairs and tables out of the window. The things from an adjoining room had been brought in there to be sold; it was the room where the shocking event had happened, and it was locked up from curious eyes.

If Dora had been there with her shaken nerves, she would have declared that she had seen a ghost. The people who were gathered at the sale were only too anxious to see a ghost. It would have been a sight worth riding twenty miles—many of them had ridden twenty miles—to see. There was great competition for the relics of the wretched man that were put up for sale. He might have been a saint, instead of a sinner, to see the way the people bid for mementos of him. His guns and riding-whips had fetched ridiculous prices in the gun-room below, and now the people were outbidding each other for his collar-boxes and his dressing-case.

It was not a very handsome dressing-case, though its fittings were silver. It had seen a good deal of service, and it was knocked about and shabby, and one of the brass handles was off. It was an old-fashioned ebony dressing-case; it might have belonged to his father. There was nothing in it to make the people bid for it as they were bidding. The competition was between two buyers: a Jew broker and a stranger to the neighbourhood. No one could understand why the broker was so anxious to possess the shabby old dressing-case. Allowing for the fittings being silver, he had already bidden twice the value of them, and he was still going on. He did not take his eyes once off the auctioneer during the bidding. His coarse, ugly red face was flushed, and his black beady eyes were bright and eager, and he could hardly keep his voice steady as he shouted out, 'Nineteen guineas!'

'Nineteen and a half guineas; shall I say even money—twenty guineas?' the auctioneer

asked in his engaging way. 'Twenty guineas, allow me?'

The Jew broker nodded—he could not trust himself to speak—and a fresh-coloured young man opposite nodded at the same moment.

'Twenty-one guineas! It's against you at twenty-one guineas. Twenty-two guineas, allow me?'

'Bring it over here; let me have one more look at it,' the young man bidding at the end of the table said, before he nodded his head.

The dressing-case was brought over to him, and the company gathered round to look at it too. No one could see anything in it. The auctioneer himself had not a word to say to recommend it. He only poised his hammer, and smiled blandly, and murmured, 'Allow me?'

The young man who was bidding such a ridiculous sum of money for the dressing-case did not examine it very closely — *he only shook it.*

'Listen,' he said—'listen! there's something inside it.'

'It's quite empty,' said the Jew broker in a thick voice; 'there's nothing in it. It's only the fittings rattlin'.'

A cold sweat had broken out and stood in great beads on his forehead while the young man at the table was turning over the dressing-case, and the colour had dropped suddenly out of his florid face. It had become quite livid, and his under lip was trembling; he could not keep it steady.

'It's something besides the fittings,' the man at the table said, appealing to the auctioneer. 'Do you know if there is a secret drawer?'

The auctioneer shook his head.

'The lot's to be sold as it is,' he said; 'whatever's inside it is sold with it.'

He was growing impatient at the delay; there were a great many lots yet to sell, and he wanted to get on.

'Twenty-three guineas,' said the Jew hoarsely,

bidding on his own bid. 'Get on, mister. Knock it down!'

'Twenty-four guineas!'

The young man was bidding, to take up the time; but at the same moment he was tapping the dressing-case, which he had got open, and all the silver fittings turned out on the table before him. He was tapping it with a chisel—he had come prepared with a chisel. It was not the first time he had examined the dressing-case; he had found out the existence of that secret recess days ago, and he had come prepared with a chisel to assist in pursuing the investigation.

'I don't think we can waste time now,' said the auctioneer impatiently; 'you should have found that out before. The things have been on view for three days. The sale must go on.'

'Twenty-five guineas!' shouted the Jew. He could not restrain his excitement. He was trembling all over, and the sweat was running down his face. 'Knock it down, guv'ner!

Don't keep us waitin' here all day. Knock it down, before he smashes it to pieces!'

'All right—twenty-six guineas!' the young man called out from the end of the table, but without looking up.

He had got the chisel into a crevice, and something had moved. It had not moved very far, but it had moved.

'Thirty guineas!' the Jew cried hoarsely. 'Knock—it—down!'

Something in his voice, or his manner, or his pale, flabby face, or the devouring eagerness in his eyes, arrested the fall of the hammer, and made the auctioneer pause.

It would have fallen else; for the man at the end of the table had forgotten to bid. He was so occupied shifting that unwilling panel by the aid of the chisel that he was blind and deaf to everything else.

'No, Mr. Jacobs, we will not knock it down just yet,' the auctioneer said with his bland smile; 'we will wait and see what the

secret receptacle our friend has discovered contains.'

He had not to wait long.

The panel had slipped back. Amid breathless silence, and with all eyes fixed upon him, Finch, the detective, drew forth a packet from the hidden recess.

He did not open it; he passed it up to the auctioneer to open.

It was the missing necklace!

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SACRED CONVICTION.

THE news of the discovery of the lost necklace —the necklace that was supposed to have been stolen, that Captain Tremlett had taken away in a rage on his wedding-day—was known all over the world within twenty-four hours. Everybody had heard of its loss, and of the suspicion that had attached to the bridesmaid, and of the cruel charge that had been made.

Society was hot and eager in its denunciation of the man who could have done this wicked, this inhuman act; who, in a fit of pique, in revenge for some supposed slight of his valuable gift, had carried it away and hidden it, and,

out of sheer malice and jealousy of the influence of his wife's bosom friend, had brought this cruel charge. He had passed beyond the reach of the world's indignant censure. No voice of blame could reach him. Who would send a voice out into the darkness if it could?

The wretched stones which had been the occasion of so much misery to everybody went back to the family. Fortunately, they were heirlooms, and they went with the estates and the title. Dora would not accept the charge of them for a single day; she would not have them in the house.

'They have brought nothing but ill luck and unhappiness to their possessors,' she said, when they brought them to her. 'I would not have them again for the world!'

Edith had ceased to hope anything, to expect anything, when the great news came that transformed her life. She was still living her dull life in the old house. She was much changed and shaken by all that she had gone

through ; she was not the same Edith. She could not have gone through such an ordeal without being changed. Her failure and humiliation had taught her a hard lesson—a lesson that was worth learning.

She learnt it alone, in the silence of the gloomy old house. The silence of the house was as unbroken now as in her aunt's time. The servants trod softly, the doors were closed without a sound, and the old creaking iron gates had seldom been opened since Miss Gunning was carried out. There was nothing to distract her, nothing to take off the remembrance of the grief and the pain and the humiliation. She had plenty of time to remember. The silence and the desolation of the old house were part of her punishment. The gloomy reception-rooms were shut up ; no one ever used them now. The big sideboards and couches and the gilt filigree tables were all swathed in brown holland.

Edith shut herself up, as her aunt had shut

herself up before her, in the bow-room, with the glass cases with the white cats ranged round the walls. One more had been added to the number since Miss Gunning's death. Blue-Eye's aunt looked down from her high place upon her with her shining eyes, and kept the past alive to her, if anything were wanting to keep it alive.

Perhaps, if she had not had all these old associations always about her, she might have forgotten sometimes; if she had admitted any new interests, the living joys of others, the hopes and interests that lay beyond this closed, narrow life. But she wanted to remember; it was the expiation of her fault that she had imposed on herself. Only suffering could have healed the hurt her folly had wrought. Pain had not been unwelcome; she had accepted it as part of her life.

It had been all very well, this sadness and silence and suffering, during the dull winter days, when Nature was in sympathy with her

mood ; but when spring came, and the mists melted away, and the earth was breaking up and bursting into life ; when the skies were blue overhead, and there was a riot of birds in the trees, then it was different. Her heart was stirred in these sweet spring days with a remembrance of other things—things she had put away from her—and the penance, the pangs of shame and remorse and bitter regret, became irksome to her. The time of singing birds had come, and she could not always be eating her heart out in silence.

The release came to her when she was least expecting it. She was sitting in her aunt's high-backed chair, in the old room, with her head leaning against the brass fire-guard, as Miss Gunning used to lean her head in the old days ; there was still a small fire burning in the grate, for Edith was always chilly now. The warmth of her life had never come back to her. The cats were her sole companions ; they were looking down upon her from the walls with their

glassy eyes, and the one little remaining white morsel was curled up in her lap; she did not know what she should have done without Blue-Eye.

One must have something, if it is only a cat, to stroke—something to cuddle into one's arms, and rub its damp nose against one's cheek.

She was getting more like her aunt every day, she told herself, sitting there with Blue-Eye curled up in her lap; soon she would grow like her in other ways. This hopeless separation, these memories of tenderest love, the dreams of what might have been—what had been—the devotion that had triumphed over suspicion and guilt, that she had put away from her, were more than she could bear.

If her husband did not come soon, and put an end to the suspense and the pain, her mind would give way, as Miss Gunning's had done. If he did not come soon, he would come too late.

She could bear the suspense no longer; the air of the room was stifling her, and she got up quickly and went out.

It was late on the afternoon of the sale at Fryston that the dressing-case had been put up, and there had been the delay of opening it, and the wonder of finding the missing necklace.

The wonder did not prevent a messenger being sent off at once to the nearest telegraph office, and the message being flashed up to town. It had reached town, it was in Captain Stanhope's hands, before the wonder had abated.

He did not lose any time. He never knew how he got out of the house, and flung himself into a hansom, and incited the driver, with promises of a fabulous reward, to drive madly to the station; how he caught the train as it was steaming out of the station; how he reached St. Oswald's before the dusk had fallen, and presented himself at Gotham House.

It was still light when he shook the iron gates of the old house, and the rusty, disused lock gave way as he shook them, and the gates fell open before him. He did not walk straight up to the front-door of the house; his heart was beating so fast that he stopped beside an old sundial, half hidden among the shrubs, to get breath.

There was a strange light in the sky; the scarlet and the gold of the sunset had faded, and left a suppressed yet beautiful lilac glow. The mists were rising in the old tangled garden beyond the house, where the pear-trees were visible in their white and the apple-trees were in bloom.

What was this apparition coming towards him out of the white misty silence?—A drooping figure with a sad, stately grace, and sable skirts trailing behind her.

He could not be sure that he was not dreaming as he stood there, that his fancy had not

played him false; but the soft footsteps on the gravel were coming nearer.

Edith had come out for a breath of air; she could no longer breathe in that close room, with those sad memories pressing upon her, and she had come out into the air. No one ever walked in that old deserted garden; she was alone with the sundial and the apple-trees, with the spring flowers pushing out in the borders, and the sweet lilac glow of the twilight about her.

It was here her husband met her.

'My darling! my darling!'

It was the old cry. He could not say any more; he could not explain. He could only hold out his arms and murmur the old tender words.

Edith did not need to be told; she read his message in his eyes. She could not mistake their message. She did not need to see the telegram he held crushed up in his hands. She would rather read her deliverance in his eyes.

It was a wonderful moment. It was more than a moment: it held the bliss of a lifetime. Time seemed to have stood still. She forgot in that sudden supreme joy the anguish and the despair, the gloom and the bitterness, of the past months.

'Did you think me guilty, Derek?' Edith asked shyly, when she could speak at all. 'You may tell me *now*. Did you *ever* think me guilty, dear?'

'Guilty?'

His dull, stupid face was very noble and tender; the light of his great love, of his kind, loyal heart, was shining in his eyes. He could not dissemble with her in that moment.

'What had your guilt to do with me?' he said, drawing her to him; 'if I had *known* you were guilty, it would not have affected my love—it would have made no difference.'

There had been a silver lining to the dark cloud that had overshadowed her all the time; but only after long doubt and sorrow had Edith

come to the knowledge of a truth she ought never to have doubted—the best certainty amid the mistakes and failures of her life—the sacred conviction of her husband's love.

THE END.

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